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T R A C T S

ON THE

NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

VOL. II.

THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

LONDON:

R. CLAY, PRINTER, BREAD STREET HILL.





And as Saul journeyed, he came near Damascus ; and suddenly there shone round about him a light from Heaven.—Acts ix. 3.

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,
AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES; ILLUSTRATIONS OF HOSEA ;
TRACTS ON THE OLD TESTAMENT HISTORIES,
ETC. ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.



VOL. II.

THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF CHRIST.
THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

LONDON :
HOULSTON AND STONEMAN.
65, PATERNOSTER ROW.

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No. 32. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,
AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

The Resurrection



LONDON:
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1850.

THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

"WE have a joyful subject to-day, Edward," said M. Basil to her husband, as they drove to M—— Court; "the last few weeks I have felt sad, very sad; and the melancholy so visible upon our friend's countenance whilst dwelling upon our Lord's sufferings, has infected me; he is one who knows the exceeding sinfulness of sin."

"Hence the value of his instructions," replied Mr. Basil, "he teaches *from* the heart, from his own experience the deceitfulness of that heart, and which, considering youth, is remarkable; he therefore speaks *to* the heart, and the Spirit from on high, who has evidently been teacher, accompanies the doctrines he delivers with his own precious blessing, and causes all to feel it is good to be with him. The delight depicted upon the honest countenance of that worthy old Hyford is beautiful; he appeals so completely to understand and appropriate all to himself. Just watch him to-day, for I know he will be in ecstasies."

"You knew him years ago?" observed Mrs. Basil.

"Yes, almost as long as I remember any one. (What a cross, surly old fellow he always was; even when young man, he was so rough and so blunt that nobody liked him! I never heard," added Mr. Basil, "how it was so remarkable a change took place in his sentiments, but I know Mr. C—— was instrumental in it, and the consequent affection of the warm-hearted old man borders very much upon idolatry; for I believe he thinks Mr. C——'s equality is not to be found.")"

"Well," said Mrs. Basil, "I will excuse him, for he owes much to those who watch for our souls, and consider not their own ease, that we may be taught the things that alone can give us peace. What an advantage it is to have Mr. C—— giving those weekly lectures on the Old Testament to the villagers! I never saw anything surpass the interest they excite."

"Yes," replied Mr. Basil, "I am almost jealous at being excluded; but he is very positive, and says, that with the exception of his old friends and first hearers, he cannot permit his dear villagers to be intruded upon; and I think he is right, for the places he attends are almost as full as they can hold. Oh, that others would follow his example, and that it might become general! Then our country villages would present a far different aspect, and the superior comfort and appearance of the inhabitants would say, 'We are favoured with a pastor who loses no opportunity of feeding his flock.' But here we are," he added, as the carriage arrived at the door, and the attentive old butler appeared, ready to conduct them to their usual seats.

Soon after, Mr. C—— entered the room, and as the party seemed all assembled, without loss of time he began to open his Bible, from whence he read the first part of the twentieth chapter of St. John's Gospel. After he had concluded, he said,—

"The first verse of this chapter bears reference to the transactions we noticed when last we met. If you remember, after Joseph and Nicodemus had wound the precious sacred body in the spiced linen, the women, who were sitting over against them, and beheld with intense interest the final disposition of the corpse, departed for a two-fold reason; the first was, to have time that evening to prepare more spices and ointments for the further embalming of the grave-clothes and the tomb; and the other, to rest upon the Sabbath day, according to the commandment (Luke xxiii. 56). The anxiety wherewith they waited for the consecrated hours to pass, is expressed in the first verse of our chapter,—'The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre.' She just waited till the time of rest commanded by the law was past, and then, with steps urged by the most ardent affection, hastened to the sepulchre, accompanied by Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. The ponderous stone perplexed them; its massive size filled them with dismay, for they do not seem to have felt any fear with regard to the soldiers whom the chief priests had stationed there, or any reverence for the seal they had affixed; these were difficulties which never appear to have occurred. All they said was, 'Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?' (Mark xvi. 3.) But what was their astonishment when, upon arriving at the place, the stone was gone, rolled away from the entrance, and the body

they were seeking vanished ! They entered in ; with tears ' they sought him whom their soul loved,'—' they sought him, but they found him not.' Here was the moment of angelic triumph ; those bright messengers had been anticipating this hour, and the approach of the witnesses of the resurrection was hailed with lively joy.

" Oh ! what an hour was that when the mighty archangel, armed with the authority and power of Jehovah preceded by the storm and earthquake, ' descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow : and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.' (Matt. xxviii. 2—4.) What a sublime idea do these few verses give of heaven's blest inhabitants ! high in intellect, disembodied spirits far surpassing mortal man in wisdom, intelligence, and power ; they are the willing happy servants of the Lord Almighty. Their number is ' ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands,' (Rev. v. 11,) all awaiting the command of him who honoured them not to take their nature upon himself, but looked upon man, his ungrateful rebellious child, and thus has ' crowned him with glory and honour and immortality.' (Psal. viii. 5.) But jealousy has no place in the angelic mind ; it rejoices in the manifestation of redeeming love, so marvellously manifested ; it desires to penetrate its mysteries. (1 Pet. i. 12.) And surely never was a happier or more delightful messenger sent forth than he who was first employed to burst the prison-door of Emmanuel, and then to proclaim to the trembling women the glorious fact of his resurrection. But all were not there to hear the joyful news ; the warm-hearted affectionate Magdalene, overwhelmed with the dreadful thought that the body of her Lord had been stolen by his enemies, in order to crush the faith of his disciples, turned back immediately, and ran to Simon Peter and the faithful John, exclaiming in agony, ' They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.' (John xx. 2.)

" Well might such tidings as these cause them to hasten their steps ; but while they were proceeding onwards, their friends were the companions of angels, and receiving commands to proclaim a risen Saviour. Less impetuous than the inhabitant of Magdala, they entered into and minutely examined the sepulchre ; the absence of the body perplexed them, and while vague conjectures began to fill their minds,

their eyes were opened, and to their terror they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment, (Mark xvi. 5,) and then two more in shining garments, (Luke xxiv. 4,) while he who sat on the stone outside said unto them, 'Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there ye shall see him: lo, I have told you.' (Matt. xxviii. 5—7.) A similar gracious message was delivered by the others, but with this addition, 'Go your way, tell his disciples and *Peter* that he goeth before you into Galilee.' (Mark xvi. 7.)

"We must not, my dear friends," continued Mr. C—— "pass hastily over this great and glorious subject. It is a theme for angels, indeed; and observe, that after them, to women was the word of this salvation first intrusted. They were to proclaim it; they had followed their Lord in his humiliation and suffering, and now were honoured with being the chosen ones to declare his victory over death and hell. Can we imagine their feelings when they heard the joyful words, 'He is not here, but is risen,' thus confirming the truth that he was the long looked-for Messiah, and that all those mighty lessons they had heard him teach for the last three years were indeed the words of eternal life. They had heard him use this remarkable expression, 'Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.' (John x. 17.) Now they witnessed its fulfilment; though perhaps they could not see as fully as we are permitted to do the vast and glorious truth the sentence comprehends. Let us consider it. Our dear Lord says, 'his Father loves him, *because* he lays down his life.' This then entirely refers to him in his mediatorial character; and oh! how beautifully it makes manifest the love of the Almighty Father to us his guilty creatures. He loves the Son, *because* he dies for sinners; therefore he loves sinners, and desires not one to perish, but all to come to repentance, and rejoices with a father's love over every returning penitent child. Again, our Lord lays down his life to take it again. This word 'life' comprehends all the glory he had with the Father from before the world was, (John xvii. 5,) and which he had laid down, veiling himself in humanity. And why was this? Even that after he had endured the cross he might no longer

enjoy eternal life alone, but might impart it likewise to his redeemed ones, and verify those glorious words, 'Because I live, ye shall live also.' (John xiv. 19.)

"Oh, sir," said Hyford, "the glorious truth of Jesus rising from the grave is almost too much for an old man like me to ponder upon. It makes me too happy; and my heart seems too big for its case. Time was I dreaded the thoughts of death, and never shall I forget my horror when I saw my poor old father die; not that I thought of the future,—that never troubled me,—but because death was such a leveller, it made us equal to the brutes, and I trembled to think my turn must come in time."

"And how is it now, Master Hyford?" said Mr. Lawrence.

"Sir," replied the old man with a bright smile, "now I can say, 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.' (1 Cor. xv. 55, 56.)"

"But," added the old man, "I do not want to speak of myself, I wish to hear more of Jesus."

"The angels," continued Mr. C——, "reminded them also of his own words; 'Remember,' said they, 'how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.' (Luke xxiv. 6, 7.) The Lord the Spirit now assisted their recollection, and instantly they called to mind their having frequently heard those words, which then they could not comprehend, but now they were convinced were fully and truly verified, for the body they sought for was gone; and angelic spirits, who could not lie, testified he was again alive. Gladly they hasted from the chamber of death, to declare the glorious news that their Lord had risen. And leaving them to tell their tale, we will once again return to that blest spot whence we can date our justification unto eternal life."

"The words of Magdalene hastened the steps of the disciples; they began to run, but John, the younger, outran the older, Peter, and came first to the sepulchre, losing no time in seeking for the body of his beloved Lord. But, behold, the place was empty; there were the linen clothes, but he dared not venture in; he revered the spot where his Lord had lain, and though absent, his soul was filled

with awe as he regarded the receptacle of the sacred dead. Not so Peter ; he, with his accustomed energy and impetuosity, no sooner arrived than he went into the sepulchre, and saw at a glance the exact arrangement of the funereal dress. There were the linen clothes, laid by themselves, while the napkin that had bound his head was wrapped together in a place by itself, to show that the wonderful event that had taken place was not attended with haste, and confusion, but the deliberate act of a mighty Being who, when his appointed hour arrived, burst his prison-house, and hasted forth into the land of light and life. The attendant angels, no doubt, thus arranged the habiliments of the world's Redeemer, in order to increase the evidence of his being alive.

“ The example of Peter was quickly followed by that of John, for he then also entered, and the order of the clothes convinced *him* of the glorious truth, while we have reason to believe that Peter's mind was full of uncertainty and astonishment. No angels appeared to him ; though no doubt they surrounded the tomb, yet to the women only they manifested themselves, for not once do we read of their addressing the disciples. Having made their observations,—confused and perplexed, it is true,—they returned to their own homes, leaving Mary, full of sorrow and agitation, yet lingering at the place. She forgot his promise of again living, and stood without, weeping. Poor Mary ! how little she was aware her lamented Lord was close at hand, and was then waiting to fulfil that gracious word, ‘ Thou shalt weep no more : he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry ; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.’ (Isa. xxx. 19.)

“ She wept ; and as she did so, she stooped down and looked into the sepulchre : cannot you fancy you see her, looking here and there for her lost one ? and though her eyes were dim with weeping, still able to penetrate the gloom, and search after him she mourned. But she looked in vain. Why should she too seek the living amongst the dead ? and though asked by the angels, ‘ Why she wept ? ’ she appears not to have felt astonished at their presence, but replied, almost as she did to the disciples, ‘ Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.’ You see she did not think it possible he had risen ; no, she believed him still dead, but removed away ; and disappointment, grief, unbelief, and anguish filled her soul. The presence of the angels was no relief ;

for her Lord was gone, and he was every thing to her. Is it not a beautiful thought to find the angels in the tomb? Does it not make us forget its mournful, gloomy character, and view it as the resting-place of the body of the weary pilgrim, watched over by his ministering spirit, until that hour when he is called to rise and take his place in the field of the Resurrection? But Mary could derive no pleasure from seeing them, neither did they tell her what had happened; he whom she mourned would himself proclaim that, and honour her the first by his appearance. She turned from the angels, in order to seek in another direction for her lost treasure; and as she did so, behold! there was one who was closely observing her; he too said to her, 'Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?' Again the question harrows her soul; and supposing he was the gardener, she hastily replied, 'Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.' (John xx. 15.) She mentions no names; she felt the gardener must know whom she meant by *him*; and not sensible of what she said, she threatened, should he disclose the spot, to remove him. But no, he gave no reply to her strange request; he looked upon her, bathed in tears; and, like Joseph of old, he yearned over his faithful disciple, and hastened to speak to her the word of peace. In a voice she instantly knew, she heard the word 'Mary!' all she could utter in reply was, 'Rabboni!' Master. Oh, the felicity of that moment! not even an angel in heaven could understand it, could enter into it. Had she not been sustained by Omnipotence, joy would have been far too powerful for her feeble body; but she was to be employed as a witness of his word and the truth of his promises, and to comfort, by her testimony, the still mourning company. Overcome with astonishment and delight, she sunk on her knees before him, and probably was going to cling to him, hardly knowing what she did, when he checked her, saying, 'Touch me not.' (John xx. 17.) This we cannot comprehend; unless it was at once to teach her that the friendly intercourse that had so long subsisted between him and his disciples was to assume a more exalted character; that henceforth they were not to know him after the flesh, to look upon him as their companion and equal, but to reverence him as their Head, and behold him in his real character—as the Lord of life and glory. He next adds, 'Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father;

and to my God, and your God.' (Verse 17.) Does not Jesus at once unite himself with his people, the Head with the members, the Vine with the branches, the Corner Stone with the stones of the wall? Oh, yes; a union which angels might envy, could such a passion find a dwelling-place among them. But, no; they rejoice in our happiness, and every newly ransomed soul excites fresh hymns of praise, and shouts of congratulation welcome every fresh arrival into the heavenly city."

"But, sir," said Hyford, "all the angels do not thus rejoice *with* us, and *for* us: look at the devil and his hateful crew; what must they think? Oh, how our merciful God has frustrated them!"

"True indeed," replied Mr. C——, "therefore the malice and rage of Satan know no bounds; he has seen all his plans destroyed, his dominion overturned, his kingdom annihilated; the Babe of Bethlehem has laughed him to scorn, and he has been compelled to bow before his mighty arm, and confess that he is in truth none other than the Lord God Omnipotent.

"With wings of joy the happy Mary hastened to her friends; she begged them to dry their tears, for he whom they mourned was risen. But alas! unbelief dwelt deep, and they would not listen: he had told them such would be the case, but to that likewise they give no heed. Thus, they deprived themselves of hope and consolation, and refused to credit her who had both seen and heard him. (Mark xvi. 11.) But Mary Magdalene was not to be the only witness on that wonderful day; the women who had been commissioned by the angels to proclaim the glorious tidings were also similarly favoured; for, as they went to tell the disciples, behold, 'Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.' (Matt. xxviii. 9, 10.)

"How beautiful is this history; the ministry of the angels, the repeated presence of Jesus, the joy of the believing women; all so simply, so exquisitely recorded for the encouragement, comfort, and instruction of the Church to the end of time. Bear this in mind; it was not for the disciples these things were written, but for those who should afterwards believe; who, walking by faith and not by sight, should be there instructed in the various events of the Redeemer's life, and be refreshed as often as they

meditated upon it. While these glorious events occurred amongst the Saviour and his little band of loved ones, his enemies were covered with confusion and dismay. Having recovered from the terror of the earthquake, and their own awful overthrow, the guard arose, and, to their astonishment and dismay, found they had kept watch over the dead in vain. Must not conviction have seized these heathens when they compared the present with the former wonders attendant upon the death of him whom they heard styled, 'The King of the Jews?' It appears their officer felt it; for, when he beheld the awful darkness, felt the earthquake, beheld the rending of the rocks and the sacred veil, his mind could no longer refuse submission, and he exclaimed, 'Truly this was the Son of God.' (Matt. xxvii. 54.) Again the same wonders were repeated; and again nature bore testimony to the mighty work accomplished by her Creator and her Lord. Consequently, with beating hearts and trembling steps the once formidable Roman band hastened from the fearful spot; 'and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.' Malice and rage inferior only to that of Satan's filled their mind; instead of humbling themselves before their offended God, whom they so hypocritically pretended to adore, they took counsel together and concocted the basest falsehood and the most improbable story that could be imagined, but which the Most High, for the furtherance of his own vast designs, permitted to prosper even beyond their sanguine expectations. First of all, they secured the interest of the soldiers by bribery, and then desired them to propagate the tale, that his disciples came by night, and stole the body while they slept. And lest they might meet with the punishment they justly would deserve were this the case, the priests added, 'If this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him and secure you.'

"That was all they cared for; they knew that death would be their portion, had they thus acted in reality, but relying upon the promises they received, and eagerly clasping the money offered, they willingly entered into the plan, and so sedulously spread the tale, that it rapidly gained credence amongst a people too ready to believe it."

"What wilful folly this was!" observed Hyford; "if the soldiers were asleep, how could they tell what had become of the body? and besides, we all know that a soldier appointed as a guard dare not sleep at his post; but how

true it is, that if we wish to deceive ourselves, we never find it a difficult task to invent excuses for doing so."

"True," replied Mr. C——. "The resurrection of Jesus Christ, while it destroyed the power of hell, and annihilated the views of the chief priests, rejoiced the hearts of his faithful people, and filled them with hopes too great for utterance. Nor was it to them alone the glad event was so replete with happiness. We also, as believers in him, are deeply interested in this vast and wonderful occurrence. And we can look upon our Redeemer's rising from the grave, as a sure pledge of our also doing the same. For it is written, 'If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.' (Rom. viii. 11.) But we must go further still: I have often laboured," added the pastor, "to set our dear Lord before you as the Head of the Church, which is his body. Ponder well, therefore, the blessings you derive from him. By nature we are part of the first Adam, and constantly carry with us the consequences of that union, namely, pain and sickness, sorrow and death: by grace, we are equally made a part of Christ's mystical body; he who is called in the Scripture the Second Man, or Adam. (1 Cor. xv. 47.) And by virtue of that union, we shall live, even because he does; 'for, as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.' (1 Cor. xv. 22.) How glorious it is thus to contemplate our interest in a risen Saviour! Job saw it, when he exclaimed, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.' (Job xix. 25, 26.) He cared nothing for his poor, sinful, polluted body, his inheritance from Adam; that he willingly devoted to the worms; but he looked forward to the time when, rising to immortality, he should in a glorified body, bestowed on him by virtue of his union with his Redeemer, appear before him, 'without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, holy and without blemish,' (Eph. v. 27;) fitted for the glorious employment of praising and glorifying the Eternal Jehovah throughout eternity. How any man can be so wilfully blind as to deny the Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, with the fact of his resurrection before him, I cannot imagine," continued Mr. C——. "He declared he had power over his own life, which no mortal possesses, (John x. 18;) and he

proved it by rising at the time he foretold. He continually declared he should die, and on the third day rise again, complete the wonderful work of Atonement, and pay to the utmost the demands of his Father's broken law. All this he did; he proclaimed aloud to the affrighted world, 'It is finished!' Alas! it could not understand the cry, but it was registered by the Eternal Three. And then, his next mighty act was, 'to loose the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it,' (Acts ii. 24;) and prove a second mighty truth, that the satisfaction was accepted, and man justified, even by God himself; (Rom. viii. 33;) for 'Christ had died, yea rather, had risen again,' and, seated at the right hand of God, 'ever liveth to make intercession for him.' The resurrection of Jesus also points to another fact; that he has purchased the body as well as the soul. It is now corrupt, defiled by sin, and only fit for mingling with its kindred dust; but by virtue of his resurrection, that body shall rise again, incorruptible, immortal, glorified, a fit receptacle for its bright inhabitant, the soul, and rendered capable of the service of praise and thanksgiving which shall never cease. What a bright prospect opens before the believer! Eternal Life is his object, and of this he never loses sight; but, 'forgetting those things which are behind, he reacheth forth unto those things which are before, pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,' (Phil. iii. 12—14;) making his Saviour the end and aim of his existence; going to him to receive out of his fulness, and deriving daily support and nourishment from him, even as a branch from a parent stem. David felt this when he said, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.' (Psal. xvii. 15.) Yes, with what ecstasy will the redeemed view themselves when they compare their glorified body with their Redeemer's, and see that it is fashioned like unto his own, (see Phil. iii. 21,) never more to know corruption. Would that these precious truths met with the attention they deserve, and men were induced to seek Him who is the Resurrection and the Life!



No. 33. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,
AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

The Walk to Emmaus.



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HOULSTON AND STONEMAN,
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1850.

THE NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

THE beautiful and animated description of our Lord's resurrection had, as Mr. Basil truly observed, filled the heart of old Hyford with thoughts and feelings too great for utterance ; it appeared to give him fresh vigour. As Mr. C—— brought before his mind one proof after another of that great and wonderful seal to the truth which the Saviour had taught, the miracles he had performed, and the atonement he had made, his heart burned within him with love to the Eternal Three, who contrived this scheme of mercy worthy of Deity alone. And truly the feelings of this aged saint have been responded to by the whole multitude of the redeemed, in every age and under every clime.

The same deadly disease pervades all ; for as by nature we all partake of the likeness and image of Adam, the progenitor of the human race, by virtue of that union to die, and return again to their kindred dust. While this is the fate of the body, and the bitter punishment of sin, we have seen how infinite love devised the means of saving the soul, that immortal essence, derived from God himself, and therefore incapable of annihilation. Yes, in the pages of truth it is written, "Deliver him from going down to the pit : I have found a ransom," (Job xxxiii. 24) such an one as man wanted, and the majesty and justice of the holy law required ; a Redeemer, whose righteousness is free, full, suitable, and all-sufficient ; one who was as willing as he is mighty to save. To proclaim the Saviour and Friend of sinners, was the pastor's sweet task ; and when he beheld the effect his addresses produced upon his flock, he rejoiced over them as his crown and crown, his dearly beloved in the Lord. He loved to dwell on the glorious theme, and was never weary of

sacred task. With a bright smile he greeted his assembled hearers, and thus addressed them :—

“Our subject for to-day treats of one of the most interesting and beautiful occurrences that is recorded as taking place on the day of our gracious Lord’s resurrection. Oh, how much is comprehended in that word ! for while ‘Jesus was delivered for our offences, he was raised again for our justification.’ (Rom. iv. 25.) We have meditated upon this our Atonement, hanging and bleeding upon the cross ; we have, by faith, beheld him laid in Joseph’s tomb ; we have seen him, as it were, discharge the payment due from us, and offer a suitable ransom for our innumerable transgressions ; and now, in the mighty act of rising again to life, we see the work completed, the satisfaction he offered to the Almighty Father accepted, and God himself condescending to be known as the God of peace, ‘who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep.’ (Heb. xiii. 20.) Observe the beauty of this sentence, and see the affinity now in existence through him who was dead and is alive, between God here revealed as a God of peace, and man, once his lost and wandering creature, but become the purchased possession of the Shepherd king.”

“Yes, Sir,” said Hyford, “it is beautiful ; I do indeed see and feel the value of the resurrection of my Saviour now, in a way I never did before ; it seems to give me my title to eternal life, and to convince me that the devil no longer has any power over that man who clings to Jesus for redemption.”

“You are quite right, Master Hyford,” replied Mr. C——. “Because ‘Jesus lives, we shall live also ;’ and because he, as the head, arose from the sleep of death, even so shall we, his members, rise also, and be more than conquerors over our many foes, through Him ‘who has led captivity captive, and received gifts for men.’ Now let us turn to a history replete with interest ; and may its contemplation be so blest by the power of the Spirit from on high, that we may derive much profit to our souls, and be encouraged to look for our Lord’s presence in all the varied occurrences of life ! The evening of the day of the resurrection, two of the disciples went to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles distant from Jerusalem. And as they travelled onwards, they talked together of all the things that had happened.” (Luke xxiv. 13, 14.)

“And well they might,” interrupted Hyford ; “for

truly never had such strange things happened before. I should think folks living then could talk of nothing else, and that the markets and daily business of life were quite forgotten amidst such wonders. But please to go on, Sir; I was forgetting myself, as I often do."

"Well then," continued Mr. C——, "they were in earnest discourse. From the name of Cleopas being given we are led to believe they belonged to the seventy disciples, not to the selected twelve. They talked of all the wonderful things that had happened, and which had marked the period wherein they lived as the most remarkable since the world began. We can imagine their perplexity: they had witnessed the miraculous power possessed by their Divine Master, they knew his spotless life, his unsullied holiness, and horror at his murder penetrated their souls. Again, the testimony that even nature paid to his omnipotence, united with the rending of the sacred veil of the Temple, the bursting of the tomb of the saints, the strange tidings that had reached their ears of the wonders enacted that morning, furnished them with such subjects of discourse as never were known before. 'And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.' (Luke xxiv. 15, 16.) How beautiful is this simple tale! his disciples were talking of him, they were discoursing upon his mighty works, his marvellous death, the incomprehensible absence of his body from the grave. Learn from it, my people," added Mr. C—— "to be often and frequent in such discourse. 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you *RICHLY* in all wisdom. (Col. iii. 16.) I lay a stress upon the word *richly*, for in many it dwells but *poorly*; it is in their head only, therefore their heart is uninfluenced. Many, alas! too many call themselves Christians; they are satisfied with a kind of weekly religion, and when they have just attended public worship, they look upon their conduct as quite praiseworthy. I speak not of those who, in total forgetfulness of God, live and act as Atheists; but of nominal professors, those who cry, Lord, Lord, and, because they are baptized and live in a country where Christianity is the avowed religion, satisfy themselves that all is right."

"Oh, Sir!" said Hyford, fixing his keen eyes upon Mr. C—— with a peculiar expression, "I wish you could make your people better understand this difference

I have found it out, first from your warning voice, and then from my own experience, which led me to see the inconsistency, or indeed I ought to say sin, in permitting our children and servants having their minds filled with nonsense. I have often been vexed, since I have had more sense, to see the foolish songs carried about from door to door, and which, having grand pictures and sold cheap, catch the unwary, like a snare laid for the unthinking chirping little birds. And this is not all ; I am now overseer, which gives me many opportunities of seeing into the cottages ; and I am often vexed to find the kind of books the people buy, which, instead of teaching them good and holy things, makes the Word of God dwell in them poorly,—in fact, Sir, not at all.”

“Yes,” said Mr. C——, “if possible, these streams of poison should be prevented from flowing ; and the only way to do it, is to be instant in season and out of season, warning and exhorting our people with faithfulness and love ; the Word of Christ should dwell in us, not merely in the head, but in the heart, ‘richly,’ even as it did in these disciples, whose discourse, as they travelled along, was full of the deepest interest.”

“But how was it they did not know him, Sir ?” said Mr. Smith.

“Because he changed his appearance,” replied Mr. C——, “so that he might converse with them unreservedly, hearing their remarks, and then teaching them, as a stranger, those sublime doctrines so peculiarly his own, and thus carry conviction home to their minds. From this circumstance may we each learn this valuable lesson, that unless our Lord manifests himself to our souls, all is cold and lifeless ; and that his presence should be earnestly desired in every ordinance ; for unless we find him there, it dwindles down to a mere outward service. I know this is as difficult to understand, unless experienced, as it is to explain ; and Judas, (not Iscariot,) one of his disciples, felt it so,—for when he heard his gracious Master say, ‘He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me : and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him ;’ he then said to him, just as you might, ‘Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world ? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words : and my Father will love him, and we

will come unto him, and make our abode with him. (John xiv. 21—23 :) because Jesus and the Father are one, and will look upon the humblest, the lowest of his creatures with love and tenderness, pouring down upon him the sweet influences of the Spirit, and giving to him a peace that passeth all understanding, and which the world can neither give nor take away. Now all these spiritual truths appear to be embodied (if I may so speak) in the interesting tale before us. The disciples are walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus ; as I said before, they converse, as is most natural, upon the multitude of interesting and strange events that had taken place ; and while thus engaged, a stranger sees them, draws near, and at last overtakes them ; he looks at them for a time and then says, ‘What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad ?’ (Verse 17.) His apparent ignorance of the marvel that astonished all men, surprised them, and Cleopas instantly replied, ‘Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem and hast not known the things that are come to pass there in these days ?’ (Verse 18.) A stranger ? no ; in truth he was not a stranger, but he wished to hear all they had to say ; therefore he drew near with a kindness of manner and courtesy of behaviour that instantly won the confidence of his companions. Again he asked them, ‘What things ?’ And this inquiry elicited a full account of all that had befallen himself, recited in the plainest and most artless manner : for they replied, ‘Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people : and how the chief priest and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death and have crucified him.’ (Verses 19, 20.) Observe how these men speak of Jesus,—they loved and admired his character, but they regarded him only as a prophet ; once it is true, ‘mighty in deed and word’ in the eyes both of God and man, but still a prophet,—a teacher holy and true, yet unknown as the Lord of life and glory. They next proceed to add, that the chief priests and rulers had delivered him to be condemned to death, and crucified him. With this sad event all their hopes appear to have vanished : ‘they had trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel,’—delivered it from a foreign yoke, and raised it to a glory and splendour equal to the other nations of the earth ; but no, this hope was at an end, for he had suffered a cruel and ignominious death

and they could not understand that the kingdom of Messiah was not to be of this world."

"How completely ignorant they were of the glorious doctrine of redemption!" observed Mr. Basil; "they trusted their lamented Lord and Master would have been manifested as a temporal prince; but how little they knew that the Redeemer had come to Zion, and had paid the price whereby he should redeem Israel from all his iniquities." (Psalm cxxx. 8.)

"Very true," replied Mr. C——; "ignorance and unbelief completely clouded the minds of these disciples, although they had companied with Jesus, heard his discourses, witnessed his miracles, were forewarned of his death, and assured by himself that he should rise again. All were forgotten, and every hope and bright anticipation seemed buried in the tomb; for though they had heard a report of his resurrection, they seemed scarcely to heed it, but rather to regard it as an event quite improbable.

" 'Yea,' said they, 'and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre; and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angel, which said that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not.' (Verses 22—24.) The simplicity wherewith the sorrowing disciples tell their tale is deeply interesting; they enter fully into the history of the wonders that perplex them; they forget they are conversing with a stranger, and they endeavour to interest him in the account of all that had befallen their beloved Master. Oh, how little they are aware of what is to follow! and when with mild dignity and gentle severity he replied, 'O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?' (verses 25, 26,) we may easily imagine the surprise and undefinable awe wherewith they listened."

"How astonished they must have been!" exclaimed Hyford.

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "when they expected the stranger, perhaps, to ask more about him of whom they had been speaking, and to express some commiseration for the treatment he had received, we can imagine their amazement at the manner wherewith he addressed them, and still more so, when, leading them into the depths of

revelation, he began to prove, out of Moses and the Prophets, the things concerning himself; and that with such clearness and strength, that they were compelled to acknowledge that never before had the Word of Truth appeared so plain. Had this beautiful discourse been left upon record, what a mighty and powerful manifestation it would have been of the preciousness of the Old Testament Scriptures! He must have begun with the first promise made to Adam in Paradise, 'that in the fulness of time the seed of the woman (even Jesus) should bruise the serpent's head.' (Gen. iii. 15.) He showed them how, after their fall, the gracious Father clothed his creatures in the skins of beasts slain in sacrifice, thus laying a dying Saviour before them, and pointing them to that imputed righteousness which he himself had wrought out, and wherewith he clothes all those who believe in him. He pointed out to them the beautiful hidden meaning of the sacrifices and ceremonies of the law, all of which were types and shadows of good things to come; and he led them to behold in the high priest, and his sacred offices, a beautiful emblem of himself, who, being 'holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens, needeth not daily,' like the high priest they were acquainted with, 'to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's;' but coming forward in his own purity and perfect righteousness, 'he offered himself without spot to God, and by his own blood entered into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.' He entered into the fearful consequences of sin, of the perfect obedience the law of his Father required, of the sacrifice demanded, of the atonement made; he unveiled to them the mighty effects of that wonderful work, and proved that Jesus, their Jesus—he whom they lamented with such affection, could not have been their Saviour unless he first had suffered. Oh, how lovely is all this! and how truly did the unknown stranger manifest himself as the Shepherd of his flock, leading these ignorant, yet faithful sheep into the rich pastures of his word, and rendering his instructions efficacious and permanent by the influences of his Spirit, which might be compared to the dew, 'or the small rain upon the tender herb.'" (Deut. xxvii. 2.)

"How astonished they must have been!" said Mr. Lawrence; "I often think of this walk to Emmaus."

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "truly, they must have

regretted every yard that drew them nearer to their destination. Such discourse had never fallen from any lips but his whose they thought were closed for ever; and we can readily imagine their reluctance to part with him when, their journey ended, 'he made as though he would have gone further.' (Verse 28.) But no, this could not be; how could they part with such a companion, one to whom, though unknown, their very hearts felt bound; who had told them of Jesus, their beloved Master, and taught them the nature of his wondrous mission, and the unbounded love of their Almighty Father. It could scarcely seem reality, and yet the past events, the empty tomb, the declaration of the angels, confirmed the truth of the stranger's words. They could not part; they constrained and pressed him yet to stay, saying, 'Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.' (Verse 29.) My dear friends, do you act likewise; entreat your Saviour to abide with you, not to leave you, but to make your heart his throne, your habitation his continual dwelling-place. Entreat him to manifest himself unto your souls, and fill you with a sense of his presence, and all will go well. The invitation given literally to him by these disciples is being spiritually fulfilled continually; and in order to encourage us to be earnest in our request, he says to us, in Rev. iii. 20, 'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.' At what door is he represented as knocking, requesting admittance, inviting himself as a guest, and desiring to exercise equal hospitality in return? Even at your hearts he knocks daily, ready and willing to enter, and requesting you to welcome him."

"It is my belief and hope," added Mr. C——, looking round on all his hearers with much affection, "that all who now hear me respond, in the words of the travellers, 'Abide with us: and you would constrain your Lord to dwell with you and yours for ever. But, alas! this is not always the case; thousands hear this invitation as well as you, and reject it; there is no beauty in Jesus that they should desire him; the world has far more attractions in their eyes; and, at last, after knocking time after time, he turns away, saying to them, even as he did to the Jews of old, 'Ye will not come to me that ye might have life.' It was only to try his loved ones that their gracious Lord appeared as though he would have

gone further. No sooner had he seen their anxiety to detain him, than he readily complied, and 'went in to tarry with them.' (Verse 29.) It was the hour of the evening meal, and as the honoured stranger took his place no doubt they thought of their loved Master, whom he so much resembled in simplicity and holiness. But, my friends, what words could paint their astonishment, when like Jesus, he took the bread, blessed it, and brake it, then, giving it to them, 'their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.' (Verses 30, 31.) Yes, it was indeed Jesus, the risen Saviour, who had been the companion of their walk, and with whom they had so freely conversed. He it was who had expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself, and proved to their full comprehension and joy that his love had caused him to leave the realms of bliss expressly for the purpose of rescuing a guilty world from the power and dominion of Satan, the prince of darkness. Well might they say, 'Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?' (Verse 32.)

"How beautifully and fully do these few words describe a teacher sent from God! It was not the purity of the language, or the beauty of the style, that caused these men's hearts to burn within them; it was because 'he opened to them the Scriptures,' and taught them to 'know himself and the power of his resurrection, and the righteousness which is of God by faith,' which found a response within, and made them sensible of the superiority he possessed. I would it were the same now, that it was the end and aim of all who profess to instruct others in eternal things, that they would make the Lord Jesus Christ the sum and substance of their discourse; that they would make him known to their hearers as 'God manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.' (1 Tim. iii. 16.) If this were the case, and ministers thus proved their doctrine and religion was only drawn from the Bible, the pure word of God, they would soon find from the interest they created that their labour was not in vain; for that the Lord the Spirit had accompanied it by his life-giving influences, and kindled a flame of Divine light in their hearts, which would never be extinguished. Their actions, too, would be consistent; 'having found him, of whom Moses in the law and the

prophets did write, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph,' (John i. 45,) they would endeavour to draw others, likewise, and thus imitate the example of Cleopas and his friend, who no sooner had become sensible of the truth of their Lord's resurrection, than they rose up and returned to Jerusalem. When they entered the sacred assembly of Apostles, joy and gladness were visible on every countenance, and those fresh witnesses were greeted with the glorious salutation, 'The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.' (Verse 34.) Then, indeed, could they rejoice; they, too, had seen him, and they related how he was known of them in breaking of bread; and again the joyful shout, 'The Lord is risen indeed,' resounded from all around. 'Yes, and to me, too, he has graciously appeared,' was Peter's happy thought. His covenant name was abundantly verified in his dealings towards this his erring penitent disciple: 'the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.' (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.) And may you, too, dwell upon it, my people, and from sweet experience find him revealed to your souls in all these precious characters.

"While the rejoicing disciples conversed, and compared the various times and circumstances under which the different witnesses had beheld their risen Lord, and then, again, heard those not similarly favoured wavering between doubts and hopes, Jesus himself graciously vouchsafed to scatter every remnant of unbelief, by standing in the midst of them, and saying, 'Peace be unto you.' (Verse 36.) Yes, truly, it was Jesus himself, just as he was in former days, his appearance, his manner, his countenance the same; but yet they doubted, 'they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed they had seen a spirit;' for he came amongst them suddenly, 'the doors being shut, for fear of the Jews,' (John xx. 19,) who were exasperated beyond measure at the idea of the Resurrection. But he gently reasoned with them, saying, 'Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.' (Luke xxiv. 38, 39.)

He appeals to their senses; they all knew the fearful wounds caused by the nails that pierced his hands and feet; there they were visible, and with the condescension so pecu-

liarly his own, he showed them his hands and his feet, inviting them to handle them, and be convinced that it was none other than himself; adding, 'A spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.' Still unbelief oppressed them, and even their very joy caused them to doubt and say, Can it be possible! But that he might remove every remaining conflicting, harassing thought, he turned to the table, saying, 'Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them.' (Verses 42, 43.)

"Having thus proved beyond all doubt that he was indeed and in truth their gracious Lord, he who was dead but now alive again, he next proceeded to say to them, 'These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me,' (verse 44;) and that these precious truths might no longer be as a hidden mystery, he opened their understandings, by bestowing on them his Holy Spirit, that they might understand the Scriptures. Then they comprehended at once his sublime doctrines; they believed him to be the promised Messiah, of the seed of David, and still David's Lord; they looked upon him with the deepest reverence and love, fully aware that he was at once their Saviour, their Redeemer, and their God.

"Here we must leave off for the present, my friends," added the pastor; "we have still much to dwell upon in connexion with the subject of our Lord's resurrection; for, with his disciples, we would fain detain him yet among us, and dwell upon the days he continued to remain on earth."

No. 34. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,

AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

The Unbelief of Thomas.



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THE NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

"WE all complained that you dismissed us rather hastily, Mr. C——, the last day we met," said Mr. Lawrence. "The walk to Emmaus was attended with circumstances so deeply interesting, that with Cleopas and his friend we thought it much too short; and though the events that followed were glorious in the extreme, we would fain have lingered longer on the road, and listened to the precious instructions that fell from the lips of the benignant stranger."

"There are few incidents left upon record more beautiful than this," replied Mr. C——. "The character of our blessed Redeemer is brought before us in a peculiar manner; the way he joins himself in the first instance to the pensive travellers, entering into conversation and endeavouring to gain their confidence; then the gentle yet striking manner in which he declares to them the meaning of the promises relative to a Saviour, and the reference all the types and ceremonies of their religion had to that wonderful act of divine love; making them comprehend that the Word had been indeed made flesh, and dwelt on earth, and that their very eyes had beheld him, and their ears heard his holy instructions, that they had witnessed his miracles, and at last beheld his cruel sufferings and agonizing death, which thus completed the mighty work that was appointed him to perform, in order to rescue them and all the children of Adam from the misery of eternal death. Well might their 'hearts burn within them,' while he thus 'opened to them the Scriptures;' and well might they hasten to Jerusalem, to proclaim the glad tidings that their Lord indeed was risen; little expecting that others of their assembly had been equally favoured, and that they likewise could reply, 'Yes, for our eyes have seen him, and he is no longer a tenant of the grave.' To confirm this precious truth, and

also to gladden the hearts of those who had not yet looked upon him, unexpectedly he appeared in the midst of them, pronouncing his precious benediction of 'Peace be unto you.' Oh, how much is comprehended here ! The fruit of the Spirit is 'peace,' (Gal. v. 22,) even the 'peace of God which passeth all understanding,' (Phil. iv. 7;) and which evidenced itself in the dispositions and conduct of his followers then, even as it does now. God's children are the same in every age; hence the acknowledged fitness and suitability of the Divine word to every state and station. Who can read the Psalms of David, and not find his own wants and experience, his joys and sorrows, his hopes and fears depicted? Prayers indited by the Holy Spirit are there left upon record; and in language the most lovely and comprehensive, his desires and wishes are embodied. The depths of spiritual anxiety, the heights of Christian joy, find a corresponding experience there; and although some of the psalms are more than two thousand years old, they are as fresh and sweet to the pilgrim of Zion as when first composed."

"That is true," said Mrs. Basil; "there is no spiritual want or care, no sorrow or temptation, that does not appear to have been felt by the sweet singer of Israel, and carried by him to the throne of grace; taught by the Spirit from on high, he knew how to pour out his heart by himself, (Ps. xlii. 4, Prayer-book version;) and to find before the mercy-seat a cure for all his soul's diseases. Then again, how joyous his praise! Whether he contemplates the works of nature or of grace, judgments or mercies, his songs of thanksgiving are truly in accordance with the voices of the cherubin and seraphin, who rest not day and night saying, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.'" (Rev. iv. 8.)

"I agree with you, Madam," said Mr. C——; "the Psalms of David contain all we want, either for prayer or praise. Whatever feeling I want to express, if I turn to them, I find it suitably defined, and am satisfied, for the 'Spirit itself helps my infirmities,' and there teaches me how to pray. But now," added the pastor, "with your permission we will enter upon our more immediate subject, the unbelief of the Apostle Thomas being the portion I have chosen for our consideration to-day. We are expressly told by St. John, who evidently alludes to the same appearance of Jesus after his resurrection as

St. Luke, that 'Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.' (Comp. Luke xxiv. 33—48, with John xx. 19, &c.)

"In consequence of his absence from the little assembly, he lost that precious manifestation of the risen Saviour which filled the hearts of the disciples with heavenly joy ; they naturally told him of it upon his return, but 'their words were as an idle tale ;' and with the most chilling coldness he replied, 'Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.' (John xx. 25.) How faithful is the word of God ! there is no desire at any time to conceal the faults and failings of his people. Every thing is related with the most artless simplicity exactly as it happened. In one place we find two reproved as 'fools and slow of heart to believe ;' here we read of the most obstinate incredulity on the part of another, who absolutely closed his heart against the positive declarations of several who all attested the same thing. But was not this permitted, yea, made subservient to the future good of the church our gracious Lord was then establishing ? Surely yes, for his unwillingness to believe was a strong argument against the enemies, who wished it to be supposed that Christ's resurrection was merely an invented tale ; it called forth a still more glorious manifestation of the world's Redeemer, established the truth of the Divine word beyond all gainsaying, and elicited a most glorious confession from the lips of the convinced Apostle himself.

"It is evident from all the Gospels, that nothing was further from the thoughts of the disciples, than that their Lord would rise again. Although he continually referred to it, and sometimes mentioned it in words not to be misunderstood, they could not comprehend him, but 'questioned one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.' (Matt. ix. 9, 10.) The Jews all believed in the doctrine of a future resurrection, with the exception of the sect of the Sadducees ; but that he who then was with them, with whom they daily conversed and dwelt, should die, be buried, and after three days rise again, was beyond their belief ; and, as I said before, none of the disciples expected it. We have seen in what a gracious, beautiful manner he appeared, first to one, then to another ; suiting himself to their varied feelings and dispositions ; giving them so many proofs of his unwearied

love and faithfulness, as filled them with joy such as they never felt before ; and so thoroughly convincing them of the truth of his mission, that they no longer held their lives dear unto them, but were ready to lay them down in confirmation of it ; and this you are well aware all the twelve Apostles did, with the exception of St. John."

"But, Sir," said Hyford, "was not the determination of Thomas most unreasonable and improper?"

"It was," replied Mr. C—— ; "his positive declaration that he must touch the wounds that his Divine Master had received before he would be convinced, was deeply sinful ; he was raising doubts in the minds of his companions, and steeling his heart against the truth. Oh, what would have been his state, had his Lord left him to himself and his own obstinacy ! As it was, he was kept in suspense a whole week : for it was not until eight days after, that the disciples again were all assembled in the same place, and Thomas with them ; 'then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.' (Verse 26.) 'The doors being shut.' This is mentioned to show that his appearance was preternatural. As before, he came suddenly into the midst of his disciples, and saluted them with the same gracious words : 'Peace be unto you.' And this, we may understand, instantly imparted to the doubting Apostle divine assurance and power to believe. For singling him from the rest, he said, 'Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands ; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side : and be not faithless, but believing.' (Verse 27.) Remark what our Lord said to Thomas,—'Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands ; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side : ' the very same words the latter had used when replying to his brethren. Hence we learn that Christ Jesus is the Omniscient God : for 'all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do,' (Heb. iv. 13 ;) and there is not even a thought of our hearts unknown to him. This is a solemn thought,—I would you could ever bear it in mind ; it is one that teems with consolation to the child of God, but with terror and dismay to the hardened reprobate sinner."

"Please to add a little more on this subject, Sir," said Hyford ; "for I feel often truly ashamed of my thoughts ; and the idea that they are all known to a holy God often fills me with confusion."

“And well it may, my friend,” replied Mr. C——; “it is a fearful idea, and causes all those who know the plague of their own hearts, to mourn and seek for cleansing. The prayer of the Psalmist was, ‘Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting,’ (Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.) For who can understand his errors? Truly they are innumerable, and every day’s experience seems to increase the awful list. But do you think it is only to record our failings, the iniquity that cleaves even to our holy things, the sins, the shortcomings of which we are guilty, that the eye of God is ever upon us? Oh, no! he sees the faults of his people; but it is that he may wash them away in the ‘fountain he has opened for sin and uncleanness,’ (Zech. xiii. 1.) He knows all their transgressions; but it is that he may bestow upon them his heavenly grace, and pardon them through the blood of atonement. And on the other hand, while it is humiliating in the extreme to reflect that all things are exposed to the Divine observance, it is one of the greatest consolations the child of God possesses. To his heavenly Father he can look up with confidence, when he feels his actions are misconstrued, his words misunderstood, and those who ought to be his friends are become his enemies through mistakes and misapprehensions. Then he feels a peace of which the world cannot deprive him; *that* only regards the outward conduct and appearance, but God looketh upon the heart, and amidst trials and anxieties, joy rises up within, and a sense of the Divine favour and approbation enables his servant to maintain his ground and persevere in what is right.”

“I feel the truth of all you say, Mr. C——,” said Mrs. Basil. “‘Thou God seest me,’ is to me a delightful thought. He knows the iniquity of my heart, but he also sees that inward conflict which his own Spirit carries on: he sees the hidden motive; if it is bad, the same gracious Spirit drags it before the bar of conscience, and drives me to the Throne of Grace to enable me to subdue it; if it is good, he has himself implanted it, and he blesses the work of his own hands: so that in every way God works in me, and causes all to redound to his own glory. I say not this from a desire of self-exaltation, but to enable those around us better to understand the blessings we derive from the Divine Omniscience. Oh, may

we all pray with increasing fervour: 'Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name.'

"Like yourself, dear Madam," replied Mr. C—, "I love to contemplate an ever-present God. There is something inexpressibly delightful to think, where I am, there God is. If I walk alone, to lift up my heart and say, 'I am not alone, for the Father, my heavenly Father, is with me.' And while I look around and behold his glory reflected in every flower, and tree, and blade of grass, in the busy insect that hums over my head, in the bird that with rapid flight pursues his path in the sky, or at myself a monument of his power and goodness, I am compelled to exclaim, with him of old who felt just the same, 'Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.' (Ps. viii. 4, 5.) The kindest feelings mark the dealings of Jehovah towards his people; how true it is that 'fury is not in him,' (Isa. xxvii. 4;) but that he 'loves them with an everlasting love,' and is tender and considerate towards us, more so than the most affectionate of friends. We see this exemplified in our Lord's conduct towards his unbelieving disciple; he knew the conflict that was in the mind of Thomas: 'Oh! could I but think it true—would it were likely I should again behold my loved Master!' were, no doubt, thoughts that continually arose. He wished it were so; but it seemed so improbable, so contrary to the natural course of things, that though his loved and valued friends declared it, he could not believe it possible. All this was known to Jesus; he needed not be told it; in pity and compassion, therefore, to his perplexed follower, he meets him on the very ground he had taken. With the most gracious condescension he invites him to examine those dreadful wounds caused by the nails and spear; he proves to him that he knew the determination he had made, and he gently reproves him for not crediting the testimony of so many who he ought to have known would not have deceived him; adding, in his own mild persuasive language, 'Be not faithless, but believing.' (Verse 27.) These words recalled Thomas to his senses; in an instant he remembered the former life, teaching, and miracles of the Saviour, and his miserable

doubts could retain their hold no longer; he could not remain faithless; and, overcome with the weight of the overwhelming truth, he exclaimed with joy and fervour, 'My Lord, and my God!'

"Happy Thomas! he was at last enabled to lay hold of Jesus in all his fulness; to accept of him in reality as his Lord, and his God. He saw him as 'God manifested in the flesh;' he beheld him as 'the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world;' as the Saviour whose birth was announced by angels in the fields at Bethlehem, and yet foretold by the prophet Isaiah as 'Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.' (Isa. ix. 6.) All this was recognised by the blessed Apostle in that happy moment; and we may learn from the subsequent history of his life that he never lost sight of the precious truth, but became bold as the others in his Divine Master's cause, and after preaching his Gospel to the heathen in the East, at last sealed the truth with his blood, being slain with a lance at a place still known by the name of 'Citta di S. Thoma,' in India; and a body of native Christians still dwell there, who are supposed to be descended from these first converts.

"The confession of the Apostle satisfied the gracious Saviour, though he gently upbraided him with having given way to such sinful unbelief; for he said to him, 'Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed,' (verse 29;) that is, all, in every place, whoever they may be, if they believe, they are blessed. And here I would enlarge a little upon the nature of faith, which has ever been the distinguishing mark of the true servants of God. It is a principle implanted in the soul by God the Holy Spirit alone, and is peculiarly his gift. In the 5th chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, he tells us, in the 1st verse, that 'we are justified by faith;' that is, we believe in our Lord Jesus Christ as our Prophet to teach us, our High Priest to atone for us, and to offer that atonement, and our King to reign in us and over us—reign in our hearts, and rule our affections, wills, and desires, according to his own pleasure, rendering us submissive to himself in all things; and such faith produces peace—'peace with God,' who, through our dear Redeemer becomes our reconciled Father, no longer at variance and angry with us, but looking upon us as his own beloved

ones, reflecting the image of his dear Son, and in all things being under his rule and guidance, which renders the will, once so obstinate and depraved, submissive, and the heart, with its affections, the temple of the Holy Ghost. By faith we are enabled to overcome the world, and not the world only, but sin and Satan also.

"How is this? you say. I answer, that he who has faith in God, and his gracious promises; in Jesus as his Saviour and Captain, leaning upon his complete sacrifice offered on the cross, depending upon his word, obeying his commands, looking forward to the bright future; in the Holy Spirit to sanctify and guide him, to uphold and strengthen him; such an one becomes a conqueror, a triumphant soldier, who has overcome his spiritual foes, and will for ever dwell in the presence of his King. When compared to this contest, how insignificant are the battles of this life, the warfare of the world! There man meets his foe, the sword clashes against his opponent, and he keeps his eye on his commander who leads him on, perhaps to an ignominious defeat; but not so the soldier of Christ. 'The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds' (2 Cor. x. 4) of Satan, and delivering his miserable captives, overturning his authority by spreading the knowledge of the everlasting Gospel and his glorious salvation among mankind.

"Faith assents to the Bible, the word of God; it 'sets to its seal that God is true,' (John iii. 33;) that what he has said will surely come to pass; for 'He is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?' (Numb. xxiii. 19.) Yes, truly, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but his word shall not pass away.' (Luke xxi. 33.) And then the fearful, and the sceptic, and the unbelieving, shall discover, to their eternal confusion and sorrow, that God is a being of undeviating truth. Oh! then, believe in him, in his sacred word; let it be enough for you that God has said such and such things. It is not for man to reply to his Creator; it is not for dust and ashes to contend with the 'High and Lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity.' Never was it more necessary than now for me to remind you of this; to urge you to keep firm hold of the precious Bible, the word of God, the Scriptures of truth.

"It appears," continued Mr. C——, "from looking at

the 30th verse of our chapter, that many other signs were performed by Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not left upon record ; but that those which are committed to writing are quite sufficient to convince us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ; that, believing, we might have life through his name. This, as I said before, is the testimony of the Holy Spirit, who has left upon record abundance of evidence of Jesus being indeed the promised Messiah, the Saviour of sinners, and encouragement to us to believe in him to the saving of our souls. This, my dear friends, is the only way to quiet a guilty conscience. It is the provision of infinite mercy itself, and which we are invited, nay, commanded to receive ; for the Father hath sent the Son to be the propitiation for our sins, (1 John ii. 2,) and to restore to us that life which, by the transgression of Adam, we had lost ; while the Son rejoiced in the appointed task, and finished the work which had been given him to perform, (see John xvii. 4,) and thus became the ‘ Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.’ ” (Heb. v. 9.)

“ No doubt Thomas was led to understand and feel all this when he declared Jesus to be *his* Lord, and *his* God,” observed Mr. Basil.

“ Yes,” replied Mr. C——, “ the same grace that enables *us* to say so, influenced Thomas. We have seen what man is when left to himself, and how deeply unbelief is hidden in the human heart. People think it the easiest thing possible to believe : and when they are told that to believe and live are the only terms the Gospel requires, they exclaim, ‘ Oh ! is that all ? ’ surely, then, there is no difficulty in attaining eternal life ; if these are the terms, I am safe enough.’ Alas ! how little they know themselves ! It is *impossible* to believe, without the assistance of the Spirit from above. It is the gift of God himself, and he bestows it where and when he will.”

“ But, Sir,” said Hyford, “ you puzzle me ; I can never remember the time when I did not believe something, though I can hardly tell what.”

“ Perhaps so,” replied Mr. C——, “ but yet it was a very different faith, I suspect, to that you now experience.”

“ How do you mean. Sir ? ” said the old man, inquisitively.

“ I will explain myself,” replied the pastor, with a smile. “ You believed that there was a God ; nature that surrounded you on all sides convinced you of that ;

you felt certain nothing came by chance, and the wonders and beauties of creation proclaimed a mighty and superior power. This was well ; but ‘the devils also believe this, and tremble.’ (James ii. 19.) Yea, they even believe more than you did in those days of thoughtlessness, for they have seen the goodness of the mighty Jehovah, and felt his avenging power. They knew what he was long before the worlds were formed, for by him, too, they were created ; but ‘they kept not their first estate,’ and, consequently, were banished from the realms of bliss, ‘reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day.’ (Jude 6.) You believed all the histories recorded in the Bible, and liked sometimes to read them, for they are full of wonders, and the peculiar style and simplicity wherewith they are detailed is very fascinating ; but there it ended. You read it as you would any other story-book, but without the least thought that all ‘these things happened for ensamples, and were recorded for your admonition,’ (1 Cor. x. 11,) and that it was intended you should profit by the examples set before you. In short, my worthy friend, the faith which leads a convinced sinner to cry, ‘Save, Lord, or I perish ;’ ‘To whom shall I go but unto thee? thou, and thou only hast the words of eternal life,’ (John vi. 68,) was perfectly unknown to you. And why? because you felt not your need of a Saviour ; because you were not sensible that you were ‘wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked,’ (Rev. iii. 17 ;) and that he was sent only to save such as were sensible of their miserable and ruined state.”

“All true, Sir,” said Hyford, “every word of it ; yes, just as much exposed me to myself and this good company here, as if you had seen inside my heart. I cannot understand how you found it all out ; you must have known and watched me long before I was aware of it.”

“I have often told you,” replied Mr. C——, “that you and I were perfect strangers until the day you so hospitably gave me shelter from the thunder-storm, (see Tracts on the Parables, No. 14 ;) but your character and that of every child of Adam is by nature the same ; and it is not until changed by the Lord the Spirit that one is made to differ from another, and to possess that true genuine faith which takes us out of self, and leads us to Christ, working by love, purifying the heart, and overcoming the world. And can man produce this feeling when he will?

Impossible! its very nature forbids it; for it is written, 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' (John iii. 16.) Here is the divine witness, a fact that is recorded in the archives of heaven, and which will last as long as eternity itself; for the multitude of the redeemed possess their happiness by this precious truth, and they never cease to ascribe blessing, honour, and praise to him 'who loved them, and gave himself for them.'

"We have entered largely upon this subject," added Mr. C——, "the history we have been considering induced me to do so. The unbelief of Thomas, so cold, so speculative, so wretched, contrasted with his bright and glorious confession, is a matter worthy of deep consideration. This, amongst others, was written for a warning, and also to lead you to him whom, though you see him not, yet, in believing, you shall have a joy unspeakable, and full of glory; for this will be the 'end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.'"

"I agree in all you say about faith, Sir," said Mr. Martin, "but do you think nothing of good works?"

"Much," replied Mr. C——, "as the *fruits* of faith—in fact, they cannot be separated; 'Faith without works is dead, being alone,' (James ii. 17;) but to imagine for an instant that we can merit heaven, or eternal life, by any works or actions of our own, is a deadly and fearful error. To *merit* eternal life we must be perfectly holy—holy in thought, word, and deed. Oh, Mr. Martin! if the very best works you ever performed were weighed in the balance of Jehovah, they would not stand the test. The smallest grain of his holiness would sink them down, and leave you miserable and disappointed. No, no; after you have done all that is commanded you, (and which, to be sincere with you, you never did, or any one else,) you must say, I am an unprofitable servant, I have only done that which is my duty to do. (Luke xvii. 10.) Therefore, look out of yourself, and fly to him who has a perfect righteousness of his own, and is therefore able to save you to the uttermost. To him, and to his grace, I commend you all; and may you each appropriate him to yourselves, exclaiming, 'My Lord, and my God!'"

So saying, Mr. C—— arose, and left the room.

No. 35. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,
AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

The Sea of Tiberias.



LONDON:
HOULSTON AND STONEMAN,
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1850.

THE NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

"WE seem to be taking leave of a valued friend to-day;" said Mr. C——, when his affectionate parishioners and friends assembled round him at the Court. "We have come to the last chapter that in the Gospels records the acts of our dear Redeemer; but we learn, that 'the half has not been told us,' that many other signs were performed by the Lord of Life, and in fact were so voluminous that we can form no idea of them. This we can easily comprehend from the experience of our own every-day life. Were we, who are publicly engaged, to record the minute actions and occurrences that come daily before us, and wherein we perform a part, we should soon produce an immensity of incident; how much more in comparison the actions and miracles performed by Jesus, who, having his great and mighty mission steadfastly in view, never lost an opportunity of teaching those who surrounded him the value of their souls, and the road to eternal life; while he confirmed the authority of his doctrine by miracles and actions that proved him to be far greater than their most esteemed prophets, and their holiest high-priests! The love that led him in the first instance to leave his throne of glory, and the praises of the cherubim and seraphim, appeared in every action and word he performed here below. Who can read the history of his life and not be sensible of his meekness and gentleness, his patience and long-suffering, his forgiveness of injuries, so unlike mankind in general, and which lovely dispositions were quite unknown to the pagan world? The heathen had only the dim light of nature to guide them, their consciences influencing them to what they thought was right; and the future reward they pictured to themselves consisting in the indulgence of natural feelings; but of the bright and glorious eternity revealed by the Son of God, they had not the least idea.

The Jew, also, had his mind blinded ; the multiplied sacrifices he beheld, and the round of ceremonies wherein he was perpetually engaged, confined his thoughts to earth ; and when they soared above and penetrated the future, he depended upon his ceremonial observances for a seat in bliss. He, too, had to learn that all his works were vain ; that it was ‘ not the blood of bulls or goats, or the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, that could sanctify to the purifying of the flesh,’ (see Heb. ix. 13 ;) but the ‘ blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God,’ and thus ‘ became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.’ (Heb. v. 9.) This was a hard saying to the proud self-righteous Jew ; but Jesus came to remove the veil of ignorance from his heart as well as that of the pagan ; to prove to each that they were ‘ wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked ;’ that ‘ all had sinned and come short of the glory of God ;’ and that unless an atonement were offered, and the Divine justice satisfied, none could be saved. At length his task was done, he finished the work that was given him to do ; he sealed his doctrines with his blood, and rose again from the grave to complete that salvation which his death had purchased. We have seen his cheering visits to his mourning friends, and heard his reviving words, ‘ Peace be unto you.’ He comforted some by his presence, even while they were weeping and deploring his loss ; and he opened the understandings of others to understand the Scriptures, of which they were singularly ignorant ; to each and all he appeared in the manner most suitable to their wants, and in complete accordance with his tenderness and love.

“ I have been led to indulge in these observations,” proceeded Mr. C —, “ from considering the chapter before me, which abounds in incident and interest. We are told, that ‘ after these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples.’ Before we complete the verse, we must go back a little, and see what ‘ things’ are spoken of. It was after his having appeared to the women at the sepulchre, to Peter, to the disciples walking to Emmaus, to the unbelieving Thomas, that he showed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias, (John xxi. 1.) This sea or lake is generally described as a noble and beautiful sheet of water, about fifteen miles in length, and about five in breadth. Many cities and villages were situated on its shores ; but it was named Tiberias, because the

city of Tiberias was built upon it : while sometimes it is called the sea of Galilee, because of its being in that province. Bethsaida, Capernaum, Chorazin, all places with which the Bible renders you familiar, were built thereon. On its shores our Divine Redeemer constantly walked ; one town after another he honoured with his presence, while he frequently entered into the vessels that were anchored near, and which bore him across its placid waters. His first disciples were there employed in fishing when commanded to follow him, and seek to fish for men, (Matt. iv. 18—22 ;) and there it was that he performed the miracle of feeding the five thousand with the five barley loaves and two small fishes, (John vi. 1—14.)

“ In 1837, Saphet, another town on its shores, was the scene of that most dreadful and awful visitation, an earthquake. Nearly five thousand persons are said to have been swallowed up in the yawning earth, or buried beneath the falling ruins of their abodes. Dr. Robinson, who has left a valuable account of his Researches in the Holy Land, says, in reference to this earthquake, that a Mahometan related, that he and four others were returning down the mountain west of the city at the time. That, all at once, the earth opened and closed again, and two of his companions disappeared. He ran home in terror, and found that his wife, mother, and two more of the family, had perished. On digging the next day where his two companions had disappeared, he found them dead in a standing posture. This was, as I said before, in 1837 ; since that time large sums of money have been contributed to repair the awful damages ; and once again Saphet is to be seen, the unhappy survivors again dwelling in a spot so fearfully endeared to them.

“ We will now return to our verse ; ‘ Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias ; and on this wise shewed he himself. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee (James and John), and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee.’ (John xxi. 1—3.) There were seven of the disciples together ; fishermen by occupation, and poor : they still pursued their labour. As yet they had not been appointed to any other work ; their Master was absent, and they do not seem to have had an idea of their future mighty mission.”

"The unambitious character of the apostles is beautiful," observed Mr. Lawrence; "they certainly were devoid of spiritual pride; 'in lowliness of mind each esteemed his brother better than himself,' and one lovely harmonious spirit dwelt amongst them."

"Even so," replied Mr. C——, "they knew nothing of dignities or preferments; they had a trade or occupation which supplied their wants, and with the receipts of which they were quite contented. They no longer mourned their dear Lord as dead; to each he had appeared, and their minds were filled with joy and peace in believing: they had glorious subjects either for converse or meditation; and they anticipated further manifestations of their Master's presence. As soon, therefore, as Peter declared his intention of fishing, they volunteered to assist him; and all entered with alacrity into the employment. But they were unsuccessful; like to a former occasion, they toiled all the night but caught nothing."

"No doubt this was permitted," remarked Mrs. Basil.

"Certainly," replied Mr. C——; "there is no such thing as chance; it is only the unbeliever, the infidel, that imagines there is. No, 'the very hairs of our head are numbered.' Where we go, what we do,—whether we prosper or the reverse, all is ordered by the providence of Jehovah, and made to work for our good. These men were emphatically termed 'fishers of men,' but they were to be initiated in disappointments and difficulties, and to learn that alone they could do nothing; for, mark the sequel, when their Lord interferes. No sooner had the early dawn appeared than they saw a stranger, whom by his appearance they felt disposed to reverence. He called to them in a kind familiar manner, saying, 'Children, have ye any meat?' (Verse 5.) When they answered 'No,' and told him how unsuccessful they had been, he said unto them, 'Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.' (Verse 6.) This spoke for itself: there was but One who had this control over creation; whose word could command the finny inhabitants of the deep, and make them deliver themselves up to his creature man. Conviction of the truth flashed across the mind of John, the beloved disciple; he said to Peter, 'It is the Lord.' Surely it could be none other; it was just such a miracle as he would graciously

perform upon the occasion. He knew his children's wants, he wished to remind them of former mercies, and to prove to them that he was in very deed and truth the same great and mighty Lord as they formerly followed; while the remembrance of this miracle in after times would be an encouragement to them to preach the everlasting Gospel, and give them an assurance that their labours should be crowned with vast and complete success. Such was the significant meaning to be attached to this miraculous draught of fishes. No sooner had John exclaimed 'It is the Lord,' than Peter, more ardent than ever, overflowing with love, gratitude, and joy, at the sight of his dear Lord, 'girt on his fisher's coat, and cast himself into the sea;' too impatient to wait until the vessel could be brought to shore."

"Well, sir," said Hyford, "my heart always goes with Peter: to be sure he was often to be blamed, but how truly he loved Jesus! and his Lord knew it, and loved him in return, and repaired the faults he was constantly committing."

"True," replied Mr. C——; "but you cannot excuse his denial of his Divine Master."

"Surely not, sir," answered the old man; "but I think thereon and tremble for myself; I see what it is to be puffed up with a sense of one's own steadfastness, and prudence, and goodness, and the consequences of being left alone, without the grace of God to guide one. And, when I think of the miserable Judas left to himself on the one hand, and the no less miserable Peter looked upon and pardoned on the other, I feel how true it is, that pardon and salvation cometh of God alone, and of none other."

"Indeed," said Mr. Lawrence, "friend Hyford, you have drawn the right line here. And while we adore the infinite mercy that pardoned Peter, we tremble at the no less infinite justice that condemned the traitor."

"In the act of Peter casting himself into the sea to meet his Lord," resumed Mr. C——, "we are also taught another lesson equally useful to us all as professing Christians. You see how variously God the Spirit dispenses his gifts, yet making all subservient to his glory. John loved Jesus quite as much as Peter, and no doubt so did the others, yet they all remained in the ship, for they were 'not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits, dragging the net with fishes.'"

"It was absolutely necessary they should remain in the vessel, that they might land their cargo, which was of considerable value. Some persons have regarded them as worldly for thus acting."

"And no doubt those who do so would have done the same," interrupted Hyford; "it may be uncharitable, but somehow I always suspect those people who strive to make sin."

"Make sin," said Mr. Basil, "how can they do that?"

"By straining at gnats and swallowing camels," replied Hyford, smiling; "they can find plenty of fault any where but at home; and they would blame these good men for landing their fish, and not leaving the ship to its fate, as Simon Peter did. I'll tell you what, sir," added the worthy farmer, looking very wise, "every one of them were in the path of duty; and I am sure our blessed Lord thought so too."

"No doubt he did," replied Mr. C——, "and I entirely agree with all you have said, but now let us see how a meal was already provided for them. 'As soon as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread.' (Verse 9.) It appeared as if he had anticipated the wants of his guests, but he intended to add to it, and therefore said, 'Bring of the fish which ye have now caught.' Again Peter puts himself the most forward, and while, as we may suppose, the others were thinking how they had best obey the order, he went up, and drew the net to land, 'full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.' (Verse 11.) Observe, it is expressly said, the net was full of GREAT fishes; and it is well known the sea of Tiberias abounds with a large fish of the *bonni* species, some of which are said to be nearly thirty pounds in weight. The supernatural strength therefore imparted to Peter calls forth our admiration equally with the preservation of the net which enclosed so many, a beautiful and significant emblem of the stability of the Gospel net, that is woven by the hand of covenant love, and will remain unbroken as long as there are poor sinners to be saved. 'Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord.' (Verse 12.) They knew, they guessed it was he, for who else could it be? Yet nothing particular passed among them; there is no mention made of any express recognition on either side,

but all doubts were removed, if any there were, when he came, and made himself known to them in the breaking of bread. During this friendly repast our thoughts naturally turn to Peter ; could he be quite at his ease as heretofore, in the presence of his Master, whom he had so cowardly denied ? I am inclined to think not ; and He who knows every thought of the human heart, was certain he was not. To him, therefore, he turns and says, ‘ Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these ? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord ; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.’ (Verse 15.)

“ Peter’s fall had taught him humility : the day had been when he fancied he loved Jesus far better than all his companions ; and while he was being warned of his instability, he persisted in saying, ‘ Though all shall be offended, yet will not I,’ (Mark xiv. 29 ;) but now, how different ! he appeals in the most touching manner to the Omniscience of his Lord, ‘ Thou knowest that I love thee.’ Yes, he did know it, and he gave him the precious mission to feed his lambs ; the tender, the weak, the feeble, those who should require the most plain, easy, and simple instruction, and for whom he would have a compassionate feeling, remembering from sad experience how low he had fallen, and how much he owed to mercy and love. Oh ! my dear friends, unless a minister or teacher knows the evil that lurks within, how can he apply his instructions so as to suit the wants and necessities of his people ? Some must be fed with milk, with the easiest and simplest truths ; ‘ line must be upon line, and precept upon precept, here a little and there a little,’ (Isa. xxviii. 10,) as they can bear it ; while others must be taught the deeper doctrines, must be shaken from their spiritual slumber, and warned to flee from the wrath to come ; thus, as St. Jude says, ‘ saving them with fear, pulling them out of the fire.’ (Jude 23.) And no one can describe the patience it requires, which, were it not that we feel how we have tried the long-suffering goodness of our God, would often be exhausted.

“ How frequently, ‘ my people, have I endeavoured to simplify the truths of God’s word to those around me,’ continued Mr. C—— ; “ and when I have thought, ‘ Surely now they must understand,’ I have put to them the question whether they did so or not. I leave you to judge of my disappointment and vexation when the reply has been, ‘ I cannot say, sir, that I do.’ And yet this is

better than to have them agree to everything, and yet know nothing. It is he who has commanded us to feed his lambs and his sheep, even Jesus the great Shepherd of his flock, that can alone bless our ministry, and render our instructions beneficial. Surely it is cause for deep humiliation, for man is utterly helpless in himself; and if the life-giving influences of the Spirit from above be withheld, we may preach with the fervour of Paul and the eloquence of Apollos, and yet be no more than 'sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.'

"Again our Lord repeated his question, a truly searching one, 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?' He replied in the same manner, 'Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.' He then altered his command, and said to him, 'Feed my sheep.' A third time he asks him whether he loved him, agreeing with the three several times he had so grievously denied him. Well might the disciple be grieved; conscience convinced him why he was thus questioned, and with even more earnestness than before, he exclaimed, 'Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.' This was enough, his Lord was satisfied, and reiterated the order that he should feed his sheep, as well as his lambs, with all the tenderness of a faithful shepherd, and to this Peter beautifully alluded when he exhorted the teachers and elders of the Church to remember 'their high and holy calling, and to feed the flock of God, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.' (1 Pet. v. 2, 3.) How little did Peter count or think of the superiority that would be applied to him in after ages; and how completely do those verses destroy the presumption of those who say they occupy the chair of Peter. Amongst the immediate followers of Jesus there was no pre-eminence; he who would wish to be highest, was to be the lowest and the servant of all: they were to be imitators of their gracious Master, who, 'though he was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich.'

"Having thus commanded his disciple to 'do the work of an evangelist, and give full proof of his ministry,' our Lord next proceeded to unfold to him the future, saying, 'Verily, verily, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another

shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.' (John xxi. 18, 19.) The day was when Peter declared his readiness to go with his Master, both into prison and to death, (Luke xxii. 33,) yea, to lay down his life for his sake, (John xiii. 37;) but he knew not what he said; in the vehemence of feeling he imagined himself able indeed to drink of the cup of suffering already mixed for the great Redeemer; but when he was tried, alas! how fearfully and awfully he failed. He who had declared his readiness to follow his Master to prison and to death, in the hall of Pilate protested with an oath he never knew him."

"So much for self-confidence," observed Mr. Lawrence.

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "in Peter's fall we learn a fearful, yet useful lesson, for 'let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.' How different was his conduct when bitter experience had shown him that his strength was perfect weakness; he heard his Lord foretell that he should be carried whither he did not desire, and made no reply: the Spirit from on high shed his gracious influences in his heart, and enabled him to say, Lord, never leave me nor forsake me; and then, upheld by thee, not my will, but thine be done."

"And did Peter suffer martyrdom, sir?" said Mr. Smith.

"Yes," replied Mr. C——. "In the reign of the cruel emperor Nero, about 65 years after Christ, it is mentioned in ecclesiastical history that he was put to death at Rome, by being crucified. It is related that he endured the tortures connected with this horrid punishment with astonishing firmness, and that, considering himself unworthy to die exactly in the same position as his beloved Lord and Master, he requested, as a favour, to be crucified with his head downwards, which must greatly have increased his agonies, but which he heeded not in the anticipation of entering that inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, which his Saviour's death had purchased for him and multitudes besides."

"What do you mean, sir, by the expression that another should gird him when he should stretch forth his hands?" said Hyford.

"It alludes to a custom then prevalent in Rome," replied Mr. C——, "of those who were condemned to be crucified being obliged to have their hands stretched out and

fastened to a yoke, which was placed on their necks, and after being led through the city, were finally taken to the place of execution. Peter and his brethren evidently understood the kind of death that was prepared for him, and then, as if he wished to show the willingness of his disciple to remain firm to him, the Lord immediately added, 'Follow me.' Yes, he was to follow him through death to glory, for he had before declared, 'If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour,' (John xii. 26;) hence the Spirit that called Peter enabled him instantly to obey the present command of following his Master's footsteps, and hereafter to imitate his example, and prove to all that he was a faithful servant and apostle, being indefatigable in testifying the word of righteousness and peace. Nor was Peter the only attendant upon Jesus; John, having heard the command, could not endure the idea of losing sight of him whom his very soul loved; he therefore silently and quietly followed likewise; 'Then Peter, turning about, and seeing him, said to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.' (John xxi. 21, 22.)

"Well, sir," said Hyford, "truly Peter was incorrigible; would nothing teach him to fall behind?"

"It seems not," replied Mr. C——, with a smile; "evil habits are like noxious weeds that are deeply rooted; they may be apparently plucked up, but no, a small bit still remains behind, and in a short time the plant shoots forth as strong and vigorous as ever. You see how our gracious Lord checks the forwardness of his disciple, even by telling him to mind his own business, and not trouble or concern himself with that of others. Oh, how applicable this is to us! How continually are we guilty of the same fault, both in a temporal and spiritual sense. People cannot leave each other alone; they must meddle and interfere. I know some who will manage and arrange for every one but themselves; and while their own affairs and families are hastening to ruin, they are busying themselves about things that do not profit. And if this is true of temporal matters, undoubtedly it is often lamentably so in spiritual concerns. The spouse in the Canticles utters this lamentation, 'They made me keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept.' (Chap. i. 6.) Many, oh, how many! at the end of their course, utter this

doleful cry, 'We have,' say they, 'watched the vineyards of others, we have been busy in teaching, in working, in leading our fellow-creatures in one scheme and another; we have laboured in charities and associations and societies, we have spoken upon platforms and in the senate, we have been praised and esteemed by men: but what does all this avail now, when we neglected following Jesus for ourselves, and thus suffered our own hearts, our own vineyard, to be the prey of the spoiler, and the sport of the foe?'

"Ah, my friends!" continued Mr. C——, "'covet earnestly the best gifts,' (1 Cor. xii. 31,) for it will not be of the least consequence hereafter, should you be eminently useful to Christ and his Church now, and neglect that communion and fellowship with him, which, believe me, is the very life of the soul."

"You are quite right, Mr. C——," said Mr. Lawrence; "our Lord said of such as you describe, 'We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.' (Luke xiii. 26.) It is not for us to act as beacons and sign-posts stuck up by the roadside, to show others the way to heaven; no, we must seek it first for ourselves, and then strive to draw others also into the same blessed path. But please to proceed."

"The reply of Jesus," said Mr. C——, "was immediately misconstrued by the brethren; they fancied, though erroneously, that it was ordained for John to be immortal: but no such thing. Look at the 23d verse, and you will see how wrong they were. He did not suffer martyrdom, it is true, but, after many persecutions and trials, he died at Ephesus, at a great age, having long survived the destruction of Jerusalem, and outlived all his apostolic brethren. Well might he close his book of Revelation with these precious words,—'Even so, come, Lord Jesus,' in reply to him who said, 'Surely I come quickly.' My dear friends, with him I would close our chapter, and say, 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.'"

No. 36. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,
AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

The Ascension of Jesus.



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THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

"WE commence a new book to-day, my friends," said the village pastor, "though in reality it is a continuation of the Gospel of St. Luke."

"I never thought of that before, Mr. C——," said Mrs. Basil; "how do you prove it?"

"In this way," replied Mr. C——. "Luke, who is known by the name of the 'beloved physician,' (Col. iv. 14,) ends his Gospel most abruptly, and in this first chapter of the Acts more fully describes our Lord's ascension, which in the 24th chapter of his Gospel he only cursorily mentioned. When the sacred books were being arranged, no doubt it was deemed advisable to keep the four Gospels together, and by resuming the narrative of events at the time specified, the succeeding details of circumstances occurring to the infant Church were continued unbroken, and the success attendant upon the preaching of the Apostles related without interruption. The book called the Acts comprehends a period of about thirty years, beginning with the ascension of Jesus Christ, and ending with the account of St. Paul's imprisonment at Rome, during the reign of the Emperor Nero. Like the Gospel written by this Evangelist, it is dedicated to the 'most excellent Theophilus,' who was probably an Italian convert to Christianity, and who was 'desirous to know the certainty of those things wherein he had been instructed.' He begins by referring to his Gospel, wherein he had related much that the Redeemer had done and taught; and in which he detailed the miracles and wonders that filled the land of Judea with astonishment, and those doctrines which revolutionize the face of the world, and now rejoice our hearts with their heavenly influence. The great truth of the Resurrection is particularly dwelt upon, and some events connected with it related which were not noticed by the other Evangelists. During forty days the risen Saviour appeared to his followers in various

ways, giving them intallible proofs of his being alive, dispelling their sorrow, and enabling them by his Spirit's influence to understand how fully he had accomplished the great work of salvation ; had fulfilled all that was foretold concerning his wonderful mission, and completed the whole by his victory over death and rising according to his promise from the tomb. But it was not only to their senses he appeared ; not only were they permitted to behold the wounds inflicted upon his sacred body, to eat and drink with him as heretofore, to look upon him and see that he was indeed their Lord, merciful and gracious, full of love and gentleness, and such as they had ever known him, but they received his instructions relative to the establishment of that kingdom of grace which was foretold by the prophet Daniel in his interpretation of the image that described the four great monarchies, when 'the God of heaven should set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.' (Dan. ii. 44.) Yes, it was in reference to this 'dominion which should extend from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth,' (Psa. lxxii. 8,) that he said, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be damned.' (Mark xvi. 15, 16.)

"To us in this distant land has the word of salvation been sent, and believers amongst us form a part of that kingdom which he then conversed about with his disciples, and which is 'not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.' (Rom. xiv. 17.) Undoubtedly, much that was deeply interesting passed at these interviews, and we would fain desire to know it ; but the Lord the Spirit saw not fit : he has left sufficient upon record for our encouragement and direction, and if we derive no profit from the abundance of instruction bestowed, we shall have none to blame but ourselves. For the Scriptures given to us contain all things necessary to salvation and profitable to life and godliness ; therefore, if we heed not the portion already bestowed, I am very certain more would have been equally in vain. But now let us return to our chapter. During the period our Lord passed with his disciples, he commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem. They appeared to have nothing to do in that city, in fact there

they were surrounded by enemies, the very murderers of their Lord, people who would do anything to check the growing popularity of the new faith, which had received additional confirmation by the resurrection, and which they took infinite pains to crush in its infancy. But how can man contend with God? Let him put forth all his boasted strength, and call forth all his powers of mind, his greatest talents, his best-laid plans, and what will they avail if God wills otherwise? 'He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.' And when he has a work to perform, it shall be accomplished, for none shall hinder it. The disciples were to remain at Jerusalem, waiting for the promise of the Father, even the Holy Spirit which he had told them of, who should 'teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever he had said unto them,' (John xiv. 26,) communicating miraculous gifts, enlarging their minds, and sanctifying their souls, and which evidently they had not fully received, though they had been baptized of John long before, proving the truth of what that holy personage had boldly proclaimed,—namely, that he baptized with water unto repentance, but he that came after him was mightier than he, whose shoes he was not worthy to bear. 'He,' said he, 'shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.' (See Matt. iii. 11.) This it was which should produce that change of heart, that spiritual life; which should separate from amongst the multitude 'a people zealous of good works,' who should bear the title of Christians, or followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, endeavouring by their life and conversation to be worthy of the name, and never losing sight of their high and holy calling.

"It is the work of the Lord the Spirit alone thus to cleanse the sinful heart. We are told that 'man is born like a wild ass's colt,' (Job xi. 12;) and that in him 'dwelleth no good thing,' (Rom. vii. 18.) Therefore, when the lovely fruits of holiness are to be seen, and righteousness, meekness, faith, with all their attendant graces, are exhibited in an individual, it is the work of Omnipotence alone, and as great a miracle as those performed by our Lord personally when he raised the dead to life, and caused the blind to see, and the deaf to hear."

"In fact," said Mr. Lawrence, "the one is an emblem of the other; for he alone raises us from the death of sin to a life of righteousness. We may call ourselves

Christians, and imagine ourselves such, but we only bear the name until his grace makes us so in reality, and causes us to see the way of salvation as revealed to us in the Bible, and to hear the voice of mercy crying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it,' when by our own ignorance or folly we are disposed to turn to the right hand or to the left."

"We have also," resumed Mr. C——, "another proof of the ignorance that still clouded the minds of the disciples. Though continually told by Jesus that his kingdom was not of this world, they would not believe it; nay, they went so far as to ask him, saying, 'Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?' (Acts i. 6.) They longed for this, as Jews; they desired to see their nation again exalted amongst the great ones of the earth, and as the intimate friends and followers of Messiah, they expected honour and splendour to be theirs. 'Grant that these my two sons may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom,' was the petition of the mother of two of them; and though the Lord then showed her the impropriety of her prayer, no doubt the recollection of it still remained. But again he checked them, saying, 'It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.' (Verse 7.) 'Secret things belong to God,' and into them we have no right to pry with undue curiosity; times and seasons are under his control, and we should be satisfied with what he has revealed. That Israel, God's ancient people, shall be restored to the Divine favour, is a truth acknowledged by all who search the Scriptures; for 'Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their faces toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.' (Isa. xlix. 22, 23.) And again: 'Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. And they shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord: and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken.' (Isa. lxi. 11, 12.)

"Yes, my dear friends," added Mr. C——, with increased animation, after he had read these beautiful verses, "the day is now at hand when God himself shall arise on behalf of his ancient people, and 'seek them out from among all the kingdoms and nations whither they are scattered.' His everlasting covenant with them cannot be broken, for he has declared 'he will not turn away from them to do them good; but will put his fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from him,' (Jer. xxxii. 40;) then will he rebuild his tabernacle which has fallen, and cleanse the sanctuary that is polluted, and rejoice over this his own ancient people for evermore. But these thoughts of mercy were not at that time to be revealed to the inquisitive disciples. It was not for them to seek to know those hidden truths which the Father put in his own power; therefore the risen Saviour turned their attention from indulging in this unprofitable curiosity to what more immediately concerned them individually, saying to them. 'Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.' (Acts i. 8.) He appoints them their work, assuring them that the Lord the Spirit would enable them to perform it, and make them witnesses of the truth their Divine Master had taught them, and which was first to be declared in Jerusalem, that guilty city, the abode of those who had so cruelly put him to death. Now all this was to be set aside, the walls of Jerusalem were to resound with the invitations of mercy and offers of pardon. No excuse would then be left to those who persisted in their resistance of acknowledging him as the Messiah; but the punishment mentioned in the parable of the king's son, (Matt. xxii. 1—14,) would then be justly and awfully merited."

"Well, sir," said Hyford, "and they did turn a deaf ear to all this goodness, I suppose?"

"Alas! yes," replied Mr. C——; "some believed on him, but by far the greater part despised and rejected him. Therefore the wrath I told you of some time since came upon them to the uttermost. And because they rejected the Prince of Life, they became truly a 'nation scattered and peeled.'" (Isa. xlviii. 2.)

"And how long will this last, sir?" said Mr. Smith.

"Until the veil is removed from their hearts," replied Mr. C——, "by the gracious operation of the Holy

Spirit, which can alone enable them to see and know that Jesus of Nazareth, whom they have despised, is the promised Messiah, the God of their salvation, who on the very eve of his ascension into glory commanded his followers to proclaim the glad tidings of repentance and remission of sins to all nations, *beginning* at Jerusalem, (Luke xxiv. 47;) then Judea was to be visited, the scene of his own wondrous labours; then Samaria, no longer shut out from the message of love, but now to be invited freely to partake of Gospel blessings, and to learn that the hour was come when neither Mount Gerizim nor any other mountain or stated place was to be the favoured spot for Divine worship, but *anywhere, everywhere*, God would graciously manifest himself to those who worshipped him in spirit and in truth. For it is written, 'Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.' (Isa. lvii. 15.) And, lastly, the commission is extended unto the uttermost part of the earth."

"Thank God for that, sir!" involuntarily exclaimed Hyford.

"Yes, my worthy friend," replied Mr. C——, "truly we have reason to do so; to us has the word of this salvation been sent, and it is this precious Gospel that has exalted us among the nations of the world, and given us national and individual blessings more than can be numbered, and greater than can be expressed; for you may rest assured that a nation, a city, a parish, a family, a person, is honoured and happy just so far as they endeavour to live and act according to God's Word; for I have constantly seen that promise fulfilled, 'Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.' (1 Sam. ii. 30.)

"Our blessed Lord," proceeded Mr. C——, "having concluded his last directions, led them out as far as Bethany. They knew the final separation was at hand, and we may imagine how jealous they were of every revolving hour. A short time before, above five hundred of the believing brethren had beheld him at once, (1 Cor. xv. 6;) but now it seems as if the instructions we have been considering were delivered exclusively to the eleven apostles, who at length ascended with him to the top of Olivet. There he continued to converse with them, com-

forting their hearts, and assuring them of his constant though invisible presence. (Matt. xxviii. 20.) At length the hour arrived; he lifted up his hands and blessed them. 'And it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them.' (Luke xxiv. 51.) 'And a cloud received him out of their sight.' (Acts i. 9.) Slowly and gradually he rose from the earth, the eyes of all riveted upon him; and then the parting cloud at length concealed him, and he finally ascended up on high, 'leading captivity captive: and having received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.' (Ps. lxviii. 18.) And what were these gifts? Even repentance, true godly sorrow for sin, the fruit of the Holy Spirit alone, and pardon for the guilty rebels, who through His great atonement were to be no longer regarded as such, but were to be welcomed and treated as the 'sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.' Well may we exclaim with David, 'Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation.' Yes, my friends, 'He that is our God is the God of salvation,' the King of Israel, the Hope of all the ends of the earth; and in the language of the immortals, we add, 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.' (Ps. xxiv. 7—10.)

"Do you think those were the words the angels used when Jesus once more appeared amongst them, sir?" said Hyford.

"It is hard to say," replied Mr. C——; "it may be the Holy Spirit revealed them to David; at all events, they are beautifully applicable. We can imagine, though words fail us to express, the rapture of the immortal host upon the reappearance of the adorable Redeemer in the realms of bliss. He left them as the King of glory, he returns as the Lord of hosts, the Lord mighty in battle. His foes were Satan, sin, and death, and he vanquished all. He beheld from his eternal throne the lost and ruined state of his creature man, he whom He had made a little lower than the angels, and intended for heaven; this being, into whom his creative power had breathed the

breath of life, was lost. Sin had destroyed the beautiful earth, and brought with it desolation and death ; but, 'man shall find mercy,' was the declaration that filled the courts of heaven with joy ; and when the Saviour, bent on his purposes of love, quitted the abode of bliss for this seat of sin and sorrow, we may imagine the astonishment of the celestial throng at love which they could not comprehend. No doubt they watched every step of Immanuel during his wondrous sojourn here below ; and when they beheld him suspended on the cross, and heard his cry, 'It is finished !' their admiration had arrived at its utmost height. Then the work of salvation was completed, and the sins of his offending creatures atoned for. Man *had* found mercy, and the everlasting Father had recorded it in the archives of heaven, that he so loved this guilty polluted world, that 'he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life ;' setting his seal to the truth of his word by raising him from the dead, and thus proving that his sacrifice was accepted and the believer justified.

"The astonishment of the disciples at the gradual ascent of their loved Master and Lord was equalled by their grief at their separation. But they were not uncared for ; messengers of peace were ordered to console them, and while their white apparel and sudden appearance proved them to be inhabitants of the mansions in the skies, their words were calculated to inspire them with strength and comfort. 'Ye men of Galilee,' said they, 'why stand ye gazing up into heaven ? this same Jesus, which is taken from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.' (Acts i. 11.) This same Jesus, yes, the very same who was once despised and rejected of men, who went about doing good and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease, this very same Jesus who washed his disciples' feet, was denied by Peter, betrayed by Judas, mocked by Herod, spat on by the soldiers, crucified by Pilate, and reviled as an impostor, shall come in that same body, even in the clouds of heaven, accompanied by all the angelic host, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and be seen by every creature. 'For behold, he cometh with clouds ; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him : and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him,' (Rev. i. 7 ;) for to them he will be unwelcome, and they shall 'cry to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from

the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?' (Rev. vi. 16, 17.) My dear people," added the pastor, with much earnestness, "pray listen; the hope and expectation of believers of the present day is fixed upon the speedy appearance of their Lord and Master. He told his disciples he was gone to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return, (Luke xix. 12,) and the angels in our chapter confirm it. Are you ready? Are you like the wise virgins, with your lamps ready trimmed, and ready to respond when the cry is raised, 'Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him?' (Matt. xxv. 6.) Are ye like those faithful and watchful servants, always prepared for the arrival of their Lord, let it be when it may? Oh that it may be so! I am earnest with you on this matter, that so I may deliver my own soul, and be not reproached as a careless watchman, 'who seeth the sword coming, but careth not to blow the trumpet and warn the people.' Again and again I would remind you that 'the day of the Lord cometh, that it is nigh at hand,' (Joel ii. 1;) a day of rejoicing to his people, and of terror and dismay to his enemies. The Lord Jesus in that hour will not come to seek his sheep and search them out; that glorious work will be accomplished: but he will come first to receive his own, and then to take vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the invitations of his blessed Gospel. In order to comfort the mourning apostles, the angels declare that their Lord shall return: 'I will come again and receive you to myself,' was his own gracious word, and he promised in the meantime to bestow upon them the Holy Spirit, not as a substitute for himself, and to cause them to forget him, but to be their Guide and Comforter, their Teacher and support, and to fit them daily more and more for their future state of glory and happiness."

"And do you think our Lord will soon come again, Mr. C——?" said Mrs. Basil.

"I do," replied Mr. C——; "the accomplishment of prophetic dates, the fulfilment of many predictions, the state of the Church, of religion, society, the whole world, all indicate that the day of the Lord is near, that it is nigh at hand. And feeling this, with all its importance, I would earnestly and affectionately warn all I can to 'take heed, lest at any time their hearts be overcharged

with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life and so that day come upon them unawares."

"How do you think he will come, sir?" said Hyford.

"Behold, he cometh with clouds," (Rev. i. 7,) replied Mr. C——, "'with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God.'" (2 Thess. i. 7.) And he 'shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God,' (1 Thess. iv. 16,) accompanied by the whole multitude of the redeemed in glory, who shall then be reunited to their kindred bodies, and thus experience the completion of their bliss, which is the First Resurrection, so plainly set forth in Revelation, 20th chapter."

"You have answered one question, dear sir," said Hyford, "forgive me if I ask you another. When do you think our Lord will come?"

"I cannot tell you," replied Mr. C——; "'of that day and hour knoweth no man.' It is one of those mighty secrets to the unravelling of which we have no clue. We know not the day of our death, in which sense he comes to each individually, and neither can we tell the day when the Son of man shall be revealed. We know that it will be suddenly, when men are fancying themselves most secure, and saying in reply to those who wish to warn them, 'Where is the promise of his coming?' We know that it will be unwelcome to those whose hopes and happiness are centred here."

"And are these the quick, sir," said Hyford, "which are mentioned in the Creed?"

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "those who are alive at our Lord's second coming are the quick. The world will be just as densely populated then as it is now, and alike inhabited by those who fear God and those who despise him. It is a solemn, fearful thought, that in that hour a separation shall take place that shall never be altered. The hour of mercy shall then cease, and the gate of salvation be closed. Those who are partakers of the First Resurrection shall rejoice in light, life and immortality; while those yet remaining in their graves are at a future day to receive their final doom. I often look upon our churchyard," continued Mr. C——, "and ponder upon that solemn hour. One sod covers the sleeping body of one who died in Christ, the adjoining one, perchance, that of a careless reprobate sinner, cut off in his sins, and unrepentant, unpardoned. A few more short years, and

behold, the Lord Jesus again appears. At the voice of the archangel the grave of the believer opens, and he or she who slept therein comes forth, the soul reunited to its body, and for ever an inhabitant of bliss. But what of its neighbour? Alas! there it continues until that awful day arrives when the 'dead, small and great, shall stand before God, and be judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.' (Rev. xx. 12.) Knowing the certainty of these great truths, my dear friends," continued Mr. C——, "makes me deeply anxious to impress the importance of them on your minds. I long to see by your daily life and conversation that you place beyond all doubt the assurance of your safety; that 'whether you live, you live unto the Lord, or whether you die, you die unto the Lord: in short, whether living or dying you are his,' washed in his blood, sanctified by his Spirit, and clothed in his righteousness; so shall ye be meet partakers of the joys of heaven.

"If there are any here to whom these things are new, I charge you for your soul's sake to search the Scriptures with prayer, and no longer to remain in ignorance on a subject of such vast importance. 'He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry,' and I warn you to prepare to meet him. But how? you ask. By being reconciled to God through Jesus Christ your willing Saviour. By nature you are at enmity with him, and under the curse. Jesus came to reconcile you to your offended Father, and to bear the punishment you have deserved. Believe, therefore, on him, and be saved, and then you will rejoice in the anticipation of that day when he shall come again in the clouds of heaven, and all his saints with him; and when the believer on earth shall be changed and caught up together with the newly risen, to meet the Lord in the air, and thus to be with him for ever and ever."

No. 37. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,

AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

The Election of Matthias.



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THE NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

THE appointed day for the gentry to meet at the Court found our old friend Hyford going thither likewise. He always set out early, that he might take his time, meditate upon what he heard when last he was there, and puzzle himself about the subject his loved pastor would next bring forward. His whole interest was excited. Called, as he often said, at the eleventh hour, he felt a constant desire for instruction. "Let me learn more of my Saviour and his wonderful dealings towards me before I go to him," was his constant exclamation; "then my mind will be enlarged, and I shall enjoy a greater portion of happiness still, for I believe that the more we know here, the greater will be our joy hereafter."

Thus the old man argued; whether right or not it is difficult perhaps to say, though with him I am inclined to believe there are gradations of happiness even in heaven, and that each will be filled according to his capability and fitness for his glorified state. The ascension of the Divine Redeemer had given him much to ponder upon, and the stress laid by Mr. C—— upon his speedy return to earth in that same body wherein he entered the abodes of light, opened a large field for thoughtfulness and meditation. Hyford's was no common mind; he thoroughly examined all he was taught, and until he understood it he did not care to receive it. He brought everything to the test of the Bible, and when once he found it there all was right, and he never let it escape his grasp. He saw and entered into the whole beautiful scheme of redemption, and while rejoicing in a risen Saviour as the means whereby was sealed and confirmed the completion of his wonderful mission, he fully entered into the fact of his ascension as the proof of his princely dignity, and fulfilment of the

promises of sending his Holy Spirit to guide and instruct his infant Church.

All these various subjects were crowding into the good man's brain when his neighbours Smith and Hill overtook him : and it was beautiful to see these three persons, linked by the closest bonds of Christian fellowship, slowly walking together, and conversing on the various histories recorded in the Bible. They were fully competent to speak on the subject, for each could truly say, "Oh, how I love thy law ! it is my meditation all the day ;" and they estimated its value as far beyond the silver and gold of this perishable globe.

"Just as you joined me, neighbours," said the old man, standing to take breath, "I was thinking how beautifully and properly our great Redeemer finished his work on earth : that he should slowly rise from the mount whereon he stood, in the very same body in which he was crucified, and in the sight of his disciples enter that bright cloud which at last hid him from their view ; and then I was thinking what joy must have been in heaven, when he again appeared among them, and sat down upon his throne of glory. Yes, I wonder what grand earthly throne could be compared to his. I have heard that some kings have very grand thrones ; but then, when I reflect what it is that after all alone can make them so, it seems to amount to nothing."

"That is true, Master Hyford," said Mr. Hill ; "I have heard poor Robert often speak of the fine things he used to see abroad. He described to us the palace of the Queen of Spain, glittering in gold and precious stones, and enriched with the most beautiful marbles, costly statues and rich furniture ; but after all, it seems, as you say, to amount to nothing, for the moth destroys the velvet, and the beauty of the gold is tarnished by age ; but the throne of our great King is for ever and ever, while 'his garments smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they make him glad.'

"Aye, neighbour," replied Hyford, "to my mind that is far more beautiful ; but what do you mean by his clothes smelling of the myrrh, aloes, and cassia ?"

"I conclude," replied Hill, "that this refers to those divine graces of the Holy Spirit which were the ornament of our blessed Lord ; but of this I am not sure, I only think so ; let us ask our dear teacher."

"Yes," replied Hyford ; "and may we ever thank God

that he has been as good as his word, and that 'our eyes see our teacher,' one whose meat and drink it is to do his Master's work."

Thus the friends conversed, and at length entered the room; many more were assembled, but not all. As the time of meeting drew on, the numbers increased, and the usual party being collected, Mr. C—— took his seat. Hyford was fidgety: good man, he always was when he had anything on his mind, and Mr. C——, who was now thoroughly used to all his peculiarities, saw that he must hear what he had to say before he began.

"Well, Mr. Hyford," he said; "have you thought much upon the subject of our last lecture,—our Lord's ascension?"

"Thought about it!" replied the old man; "indeed, sir, I have thought of it very often, and before you begin to-day, sir, I want to ask you the meaning of the myrrh, aloes, and cassia, wherewith the garments of God the Redeemer are said to smell." (Psalm xlv. 8.)

"The psalm you have alluded to," replied Mr. C——, "is a glorious prophecy of Jesus as the king and bridegroom of his Church, ruling and governing it according to his gracious will, and piercing the hearts of those who naturally are his enemies with the arrows of conviction, and causing them to fall under him as his willing and subdued captives. When he ascended up on high, and entered the realms of glory, he appeared in his full character of Mediator and Redeemer. His 'garments' are said by the Spirit to have smelt of 'myrrh,' an emblem of his bitter sufferings, yet mingled with those divine graces which ever cause his 'name to be as ointment poured forth,' and are to the believer as a savour sweet, fragrant, and full of odours, while on his 'head are many crowns,' all of which are connected with, and bear reference to his cross; for truly there was not an instance wherein he triumphed over the malice of Satan, that produced not a corresponding cause of glory, or a variety in creation that does not bespeak his power and love. Seated on his heavenly throne, the Lord Jesus beholds his kingdom and inheritance here below, and rules over it as it best pleaseth him, and with unerring wisdom. As Lord of the harvest he watches with unwearied diligence over his domain. He says, 'I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.' (Isaiah xxvii. 3.) And this promise he repeated to his

followers before he left them, declaring that it was 'expedient for them that he should go away : for if he went not away, the Comforter would not come to them ; but if he departed, he would send him.' (See John xvi. 7.) And this gracious word is being constantly fulfilled, for now he reigns above, daily adding to the number of his believing people, causing all things to work together for their good, and rendering the events of life, the actions of statesmen and princes, the rise and fall of kingdoms, the discoveries in science, to tend to the object he never loses sight of for a moment, namely, the increase of his kingdom in this world, and the hastening on of that glorious time when he shall be King of kings and Lord of lords, and 'when righteousness shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea.' 'Until then the heavens must receive him,' (Acts iii. 21 ;) but I believe the hour is swiftly approaching when the allotted time will be expired, and in that same body wherein he ascended shall he return, 'and his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley.' (Zech. xiv. 4.) 'And the Lord shall be king over all the earth : in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one.' (Verse 9.)

"And this brings me," continued Mr. C——, "to the consideration of our chapter, which in fact has been almost too long neglected. If you recollect, we broke off last week where it is related that angels were graciously sent to comfort the disciples, who were straining their eyes in order to endeavour to see as much as possible of their beloved and departing Lord. Their looks were fixed upon the clouds which had concealed him whom their soul loved, and whom in the flesh they would never behold again. But we can pardon their eager gaze, for we can enter into their feelings, and lament with them the loss they had experienced."

"But, sir," said Hyford with much animation, "what an idea it gives us of the little step there is between us and glory! To think that yonder cloud alone conceals our dear Saviour from us ; that openly, visibly, he showed to us all whither he was gone ; and then to remember that he has said,—'I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am there ye may be also !' (John xiv. 3.) How delightful ! It warms my old heart thus to

realize the presence of my Saviour, and to apply his promises, for surely he scattered them abroad for any one to gather, and he who collects the most has the greatest comfort."

"Very true," replied Mr. C——, "and the disciples found it so; they no longer repined; the promise given them of his return was enough. They rose up and went back to Jerusalem from Mount Olivet where they were, and which is from the city a sabbath day's journey, or about a mile."

"When God gave his law to the Israelites did he thus limit these distances, sir?" said Mr. Hill.

"No," replied Mr. C——; "it was one of those traditions of the elders which made it unlawful for them to travel further on the Sabbath; and which they as strictly enforced as if it had been commanded by the Most High, the violating it being punished with stripes. To this day they are as strict as formerly, and it is well known that the Jews in London will not infringe upon it *outside* the city, but it seems that the law only applies to distances from towns, for as long as they are *within* them they may go any distance, walking back and forwards to their synagogue or place of worship."

"It is fortunate they make the law so convenient," remarked Mr. Lawrence; "I was thinking that in such a place as London, where the distances are so considerable, they would in numerous instances find it impossible to attend public worship within the required limits; but laws framed by man are tolerably accommodating; he is a great friend to expediency, and generally discovers some easy way of saving his conscience while he consults his convenience."

"You are severe, my good friend," said Mr. C—— with a smile; "but certainly with regard to all the traditions of the elders your remarks are just; they were the means of causing the people to transgress the commandments of God, and set them aside, while the word of man was strictly enforced."

"And are they not doing the same now, sir?" said Mr. Basil.

"They are trying to do so," replied Mr. C——, "and endeavouring to hold up the tenets of the fathers and human compositions to the neglect of the Bible, God's precious word, the only infallible guide we possess for faith and practice. Rome has long followed this deadly

error, and while she deprives her people of the Book of Life, she leads them by tradition, and draws them into a vortex of error and iniquity. But we must follow the disciples, who we are told congregated together in an 'upper room' with the twelve apostles, and Mary and the rest of the holy women who followed their Lord during his earthly abode amongst them. This is the last time the Virgin Mary is mentioned in the Bible, and truly we know little about her, for the Lord the Spirit, foreseeing the sinful adoration that would be paid her, mentions her as little as possible, and evidently shows that she is no more entitled than any other mortal to receive those acts of praise and worship which belong to God alone, and which call down upon the Church of Rome the fearful denunciations mentioned in the Bible as visiting those who make to themselves any strange god or idol. It is also significantly added, 'They continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.'

"Now," added Mr. C——, "if Mary was indeed the superior mortal the Church of Rome considers her, would she have such a sense of her own wants, weakness, sinfulness and insufficiency, as to be an humble suppliant at the throne of grace? No; but those poor misguided people say she is to be the mediatrix between God and man, and use her influence with Jesus, our divine, adorable Redeemer, for the benefit of fallen man. Oh! what a wretched, degraded religion! what a perversion of the truth! what blasphemy! My very soul recoils at it," proceeded the pastor, "I am jealous for the honour of my Lord, and I cannot endure the idea of his transcendent love, his unexampled mercy, his gracious mediation, to be for a moment infringed upon. The soul of Mary is undoubtedly in glory, amongst the multitude that none can number, and she is anticipating the near approach of the resurrection of her body, when her bliss will be complete.

"But I cannot see," added Mr. C——, his countenance bespeaking considerable agitation; "I cannot see wherein she differs from my own dearly-loved mother. Her soul, too, I firmly believe, is in the realms of bliss; for I believe her to have been washed, justified, sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. And what more was done for Mary? Both by nature were sinners—both regenerated—not by the waters of baptism, for we have no proof that Mary ever was baptized; indeed, I

should think not—but by the grace of the Lord, the Spirit, who alone can change the heart, and implant that ‘holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.’ Mary declared that her spirit rejoiced in God her Saviour; and, no doubt, that Holy Spirit which had set her apart, and chosen her in preference to all the maidens of Israel, as the instrument whereby the Most High condescended to enter this sinful world in the form of man, taught her that then her task was performed, and that she was only to know him as her God and Saviour. Every approach at familiarity we have seen repulsed by Jesus, from the hour he entered upon his public ministry. Until then he was as a child, submissive and obedient in all things. But after that, he evidently took every opportunity to prevent Mary presuming upon the relationship which, as a mortal, she might dwell upon with complacency. When she requested him to supply wine for the marriage-feast, he said to her, ‘Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.’ (John ii. 4.) When, with his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh, she came standing without the door of the house where he was teaching the multitude, and sent in the message that his mother and brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him, he acknowledged her not as such; for said he, ‘Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?’—then looking round on his disciples he exclaimed, ‘Whosoever shall do the will of my Father that is in heaven, the same is my mother, and sister, and brother.’

“While occupied in prayer, and waiting for the fulfilment of the Redeemer’s promise of the Spirit from above, until which time they were to continue at Jerusalem, a sudden impulse seems to have been given to Peter. For ‘in those days he stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.’ He then proceeded to mention his fate, which, truly, was a fearful one, and then proposed that another Apostle should be elected in his room.”

“And was all Judas’s treachery foretold, sir?” said Mr. Smith.

“Yes,” replied Mr. C——, “and that in language not to be mistaken. David, in the 41st Psalm, 9th verse, says, ‘Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me;’

and did not Judas this? and is not his base conduct distinctly mentioned? . He had been numbered with them, but it was, 'that the Scriptures might be fulfilled;' and upon hearing this, let none of you have hard thoughts of God, and say, 'If this was the case, Judas was not to blame; it was ordained that he should betray Jesus, and therefore he could not help it.' This I know to be the plea of those who strive to make excuses for sin. But woe unto them! they will find to their cost, that life and death, blessing and cursing, have been set before them, (Deut. xxx. 19,) and that they are invited, nay entreated, to choose the good and refuse the evil: but their own waywardness and self-will destroys them, and prevents their humbling themselves before God, who would help them in all their trials, and strengthen them to do his will, if they only asked for assistance and direction. Peter next speaks of what was done with the thirty pieces of silver, which he justly calls the 'reward of iniquity.' A field was purchased with it, by the chief-priest, as a burying-place for the strangers that died during their sojourn at Jerusalem, and was known by the name of 'Aceldama, or the field of blood:' a goodly and an applicable name, for it was doubly such; first, because 'it was the price of blood,' (Matt. xxvii. 6;) and next, because it was sprinkled with his blood, that was sold for that price; and then again, that in that same field of horrors the wretched Judas saw fit to complete his career of misery; for while St. Matthew merely tells us, that 'he cast down the silver pieces in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself,' Peter enters into particulars, mentioning circumstances peculiarly horrible and indicative of the Divine displeasure, rendering him, in his mangled state, a spectacle to angels and to men, who would ever look upon him as a murderer and a suicide.

"The apostle having thus noticed the fate of Judas, once his companion and friend, the follower, with himself, of Jesus their Lord and Master, next proceeds to accomplish the task he has undertaken; viz. to invite them to elect another apostle in the room of Judas—one who had personally known the Saviour, and could bear equal testimony with themselves to his doctrine and miracles, his holy life, his death and resurrection. The whole assembly saw at once the propriety of Peter's proposition; and from amongst their number they selected two—Joseph, called Barsabas, and Matthias. Both, in the judgment of the

the apostles and disciples, were deserving of the high and important office ; both were men of eminent piety ; and therefore they referred the matter to Jesus, the Head of his Church, who, though invisible, still was their Ruler and Guide, fulfilling his gracious promise of 'never leaving or forsaking them.' They prayed ; yes, they appealed to the Searcher of all hearts, to determine himself the important point, and declare whether of the two he had chosen."

"How anxious they must have been!" remarked Hyford.

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "to take part of the ministry and apostleship forfeited by Judas, and in his stead, was no trifling matter ; it was an office before which our highest appointments in this kingdom sink into comparative insignificance. It is true it did not clothe the recipient in purple, or put gold into his pocket ; on the contrary, it rendered him an object for persecution, and a subject of contempt, and most probably of either fire or sword. But the followers of Jesus had learned of the Spirit not to fear those who could kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do, (Luke xii. 4 ;) they heeded not man, but they were covetous after the best gifts, and longed to be counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake. But their duty under the trying circumstances," added Mr. C——, "was to wait patiently their Master's decision ; they were willing to abide by that, and to be satisfied with the result. After the prayer we have considered, they proceeded to act : it is said, 'they gave forth their lots ; and the lot fell upon Matthias ; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.'" Acts i. 26.

"I should fancy the one who was rejected was much hurt," observed Hyford. "I think I should have been so."

"Perhaps you might, my worthy friend," replied Mr. C—— ; "and no doubt would have been so, if left to the direction and feelings of your natural heart, which is ever prone to envy and self-exaltation. But not so with those who are under the influence of the Spirit of God ; he so completely alters the nature and disposition, that he causes his people 'in lowliness of mind to think others better than themselves,' and esteem them as far more deserving of the Divine favour. They feel the plague within, and think none so bad as themselves. Consequently, they are quite satisfied with any distinction their heavenly Master sees fit to put upon them ; and instead of being jealous,

they are stirred up to more self-examination, to a closer walk with God, to more diligent seeking after his mind and will. We may readily imagine all this was the case with Barsabas, and that he was quite satisfied that his fellow-disciple should be raised to the apostolic dignity, while he continued to be an equally zealous promoter of the holy cause : and such, in fact, was the case ; for we read of him afterwards in the 15th of the Acts, as chosen with Silas to be bearers of letters to the Gentile brethren, when a controversy about the circumcision of the converts was started : he and Silas are spoken of as ‘chief men among the brethren,’ possessing eminent gifts, and able to build them up in their most holy faith. And it is a curious fact, that while this mention is made of Barsabas, otherwise called Judas, Matthias is never spoken of again. Yet, no doubt our gracious Lord had sufficient reasons for thus choosing him to supply the place of the traitor.”

“ But before we part,” continued the pastor, “ I would say a few words on the method by which Matthias was chosen,—namely, by lot. You learn thereby that the divine providence of God orders and directs all the affairs of life, and that the most trifling, as well as the most important matters, are under his guidance and control. There is no such thing as chance ; the infidel and atheist may talk of chance, but the Bible teaches differently : therein we learn that the hand of the fowler who deprives yon little sparrow of existence is guided by its great Creator ; that the hairs of our head are numbered, and every event of our lives under his direction. Remember, you are never for one instant withdrawn from the eye of God ; wherever you are, there he is ; for ‘ in him you live, and move, and have your being :’ consequently, his omnipotence follows you, and regulates and permits every action you perform. You say, I will do so and so, I will take a journey, and be absent such a time ; I will see this person and that, and I will do many great and important acts ; but what says God to all this ? It is not according to my will, therefore it shall not be ; and all these arrangements shall come to nought, and I will prove that I am God, and there is none beside me, he who alone orders and disposes the affairs of man. To the mind of the believer this is a feeling replete with consolation : it deprives him of that miserable care and anxiety which belong to the people of this world, who are wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight ; it causes him to roll all his cares upon

him who careth for him, and to wait patiently until he unravels the often complicated threads in life's daily occurrences, and renders them all plain and straightforward."

"Oh! sir," said Hyford, "happy are those who can thus resign themselves to the will of God; methinks they must be much happier than if they tried to manage for themselves. But why," added the old man, "should I say 'I think it,' when I *know* it by my own experience? Since I have learned to take all my cares and anxieties, my trials and difficulties, to the foot of Him who knows everything much better than I do myself, I am happy; everything goes right; and though sometimes matters seem to turn out contrary, and my old rebellious heart is fain to rise, the word of exhortation is near, and, 'Wait, John, wait, and thou wilt see that this is working for thy good,' is whispered in my ear. And truly, sir, so it is; after a time, all comes right, and God has disposed my lot for me far better than I could have done it myself."

"It is pleasant to hear you say so, Master Hyford," said Mr. Lawrence; "it is by testimony such as this we honour God's word—we set to our seal that he is true—and thus contradict the sinner, who would fain have us act directly the reverse, and, like himself, live in care, and anxiety, and misery, all the day long."

"I have one word more to add on the subject of our chapter," said Mr. C——. "Matthias was chosen by lot; but before they drew it, they made a solemn appeal to the Lord Jehovah, that he might himself guide and direct them, and that the whole affair might be conducted under the influence and disposition of his Spirit. Learn from hence to own the hand of your covenant God and Father in all things, and to pray for grace to be faithful in the discharge of your respective duties, knowing that you are just where he has placed you, and that he will demand a strict account of how you have acted with regard to those several and important trusts which he has committed to you in preference to others, perhaps more capable of fulfilling them, and certainly equally worthy of the charge. Bear this in mind, my dear friends, and then you will not have listened to what I have said upon the Election of Matthias in vain."

38. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,
AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

Pentecost.



LONDON:
HOULSTON AND STONEMAN,
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1851.

THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

"THE chapter to which I wish to call your attention to-day," said Mr. C—— to his numerous party, "is the second of the Acts of the Apostles. There is very much recorded calculated to interest and instruct you; and I earnestly hope that its events, being of such infinite importance, may receive your undivided notice, and that the Divine blessing will accompany my imperfect endeavours to lay them before you. You, my worthy friends," added the pastor, turning especially to Hyford, Smith, and Hill, "no doubt remember my conversing with you some time since in Mrs. Roberts's cottage, upon the building of the Tower of Babel?"

"I remember it well," said Hyford; "it was the day after you picked up poor Johnson."

"Have you that man now, Mr. C——?" said Mrs. Basil. "I recollect hearing much about it at the time."

"No," replied Mr. C——; "he stayed with me several months, and conducted himself quite to my satisfaction; but a friend of mine going to America, determined me to give him his choice as to returning: after many struggles with his feelings, he at length thought that he might be useful amongst his ignorant brethren, and resolved to try. My friend is a true Christian; he entered at once into Johnson's views, and promised to assist him in his interesting mission. They arrived in safety at their place of destination, which was somewhere in Upper Canada; and when last I heard of them, they were labouring together in the good cause, for poor Johnson had become warmly attached to my friend, and postponed leaving him from one month to another. He now speaks English fluently, and can write well, being a person of great quickness of intel-

lect, and easily instructed. What made me mention him," continued Mr. C——, "was, because at the time he wandered hither, his foreign manners and language excited great astonishment, and he was very useful in enabling my hearers to comprehend the consequences of the confusion of tongues, and teaching them how, by that wonderful judgment, the Lord Jehovah compelled the inhabitants of the earth to scatter themselves abroad, and thus generally to people it. But I recollect I mentioned one most awful circumstance connected with the visitation, namely, that the Hebrew tongue being only retained in one family, and consequently the true religion only known and practised by them, the rest became quickly strangers to the right worship of God, and followed the natural bent of their sinful hearts, which were soon sunk in ignorance and blind idolatry. For 2,203 years did this state of things remain, and men knew nothing of the God who made them; they cared not to retain the Most High in their knowledge, and as a punishment, 'he gave them over to a reprobate mind,' (Rom. i. 28,) and allowed them to follow the dictates of their own perverse wills.

"The history of the world during this long period is sad: one course of superstition, war, and violence. Here and there a mind more finely constituted than the rest is to be found, but still lost in the depths of Paganism, and endeavouring in vain to escape from the mazes of error. We, who possess the light of revelation, as set before us in the Scriptures, can scarcely comprehend the depths of ignorance that clouded the minds of men otherwise learned and polished. But remember, I speak in this respect of ourselves in this highly-favoured land, where uninterruptedly we can read the Bible when we please, no man making us afraid. But not so, even now, where the superstition of Rome holds sway and dominion: there the pure light of the Gospel is withheld, and her children weary themselves in vain, seeking for a peace they cannot find. And as the miracle of the gift of tongues was absolutely necessary to cancel the fearful consequences of the confusion of tongues, so must the Lord the Spirit graciously pour down his life-giving influences upon mankind, to enable them to discover Jesus Christ and him crucified, as the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

"We will now begin the chapter I have selected," added Mr. C——, opening his Bible, and beginning to read as follows: "'And when the day of Pentecost was fully

come, they were all with one accord in one place.' (Acts ii. 1.) The word Pentecost is derived from a Greek word signifying the *fiftieth*, because the feast of Pentecost was celebrated the fiftieth day after the second day of the feast of the Passover. It was also called 'The Feast of Weeks,' because it was kept seven weeks after the Passover. The great and bounteous Author of all blessings, both temporal and spiritual, in giving laws to his chosen people, the Jews, ordained especially that upon the completion of the harvest a solemn feast should be kept. In that country, the harvest began much earlier than with us, the 16th of the month Nisan, answering to half our March and April, being the day appointed for the wave-offering of the first sheaf to be made. 'For thus the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come unto the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the first-fruits of your harvest unto the priest: and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.' (Lev. xxiii. 9—11.) Like all the ordinances of the Levitical dispensation, this also pointed to a great and glorious truth. The almighty King of Israel, in giving laws to his people, never lost sight of the good things to come; the solemn feasts, the days of humiliation, the offices of the priesthood, the various parts of the tabernacle, the innumerable sacrifices and ceremonies,—all were types of the Redeemer and his kingdom; and were we more influenced and taught by the Divine Spirit, we should behold such wonderful beauty in the instructions given to Moses as would astonish and compel us to exclaim, 'Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!'

"The events of the first day of Pentecost after the ascension of our Lord, were the fulfilment of the type contained in the Levitical command I have just read. For, as the Israelites were enjoined to keep the Feast of Weeks, and consecrate it by a tribute of a free-will offering unto the Lord Jehovah, so was this service an emblem of the first pouring out of the Spirit from on high, which should so enlarge the borders of the infant Church, as would greatly increase the confidence of its first labourers, and be an earnest of that great and glorious harvest which hereafter shall be reaped when Jesus, the great Husbandman, sends forth his reapers, the angels, to gather his wheat home to

his heavenly garner. One after another is now being led in the road to Zion ; thousands, and hundreds of thousands, have heard the voice which has warned them to flee from the wrath to come ; and the influences of the Spirit are evidently visible, even as the gentle dew is to be perceived by its invigorating effects upon the tenderest herb."

"That is very true, Mr. C——," observed Mr. Basil ; "it is beautiful to see one after another roused by various means from their deadly slumber, and so powerfully declaring the unwillingness of the Most High to condemn his creatures."

"We have had an instance of this in a farmer living near to me," remarked Mr. Lawrence ; "in fact, though not in this parish, his lands adjoined mine, and we can see his house from my flower-garden. If ever any one lived without God in the world, it was this man. Young in years, he was old in sin ; not that he was an immoral profligate, but his temper was so ungovernable, and his habit of swearing so awful, that it was only a wonder he was permitted to live. At length, in a fit of passion, he burst a blood-vessel, and for weeks his life hung on a thread ; and the doctors told him, if he did not curb his temper, he was, in fact, a dead man. Well, that was two years ago ; he got better, as long as the warning voice of the doctor was attended to ; but after a time he forgot it, and became worse than ever. Then came on the threatened punishment ; the tender lungs could not sustain the violence they met with, and again the unfortunate man was laid upon the bed of suffering. But even there he rejoiced in sin ; scarcely a word was uttered without an oath, and all seemed desolation. He knew nothing of God, and he gave himself up unto the ways of death. But He who made him had purposes of mercy towards him ; even at the eleventh hour his power was manifested ; He induced Mr. W——, who is now a devoted servant of the Lord in that parish,—as you know, Mr. C——," continued Mr. Lawrence—"to go and visit him. He spoke plainly to him ; conviction came home to his mind, and truly the lion was transformed into the lamb. For months he lay upon his bed, unable sometimes to be stirred ; but the peace, the real peace, produced from a feeling of sin pardoned, was beautiful. Nor was his religion confined to words ; there were some he had deeply injured : to these he never thought he could make sufficient restitution ; his whole desire was to prove his sense of pardoning love, and

at length he died, calm and gentle, even as a babe falling asleep. I have mentioned this little tale," added Mr. Lawrence, "because, as you truly say, sir, the influences of the Lord the Spirit are continually visible; indeed, they have been as a constant flowing stream ever since that day of Pentecost whereof you are reading."

"Yes," said Mr. C——, "and your interesting story proves it. We will now proceed with our chapter. As the disciples were collected together, waiting as they were desired for this promise from above, 'suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.' (Acts ii. 2.) The noise seemed to be the accompaniment of the gift, and to precede it, as if to prepare the disciples for what was about to follow; for as they looked on each other, wondering at what could be coming to pass, they saw cloven tongues, of the appearance of fire, resting upon all; and then each began in a different language to glorify their great and almighty King.

"We can scarcely realize the feelings of the disciples when they were thus visibly blessed from on high. The gift imparted to them enabled them to understand the hidden meaning of Divine truth in a way unknown before, and, as our Lord declared, 'to bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever he had said to them.' Then they recollected that John the Baptist declared, that while he washed them in the waters of the Jordan, in token that he outwardly consecrated them to the service of Him who was at hand; that He, this Divine Being, should 'baptize them with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.' Then they beheld themselves set apart and consecrated to the service of Jehovah, accepted in the Beloved, and quite prepared for the task of mercy and love that was appointed them. Had not this miracle been wrought, how could they have performed their departing Master's command, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature?' He who rules over and directs the affairs of this vast world, had hitherto permitted the darkness of ignorance and superstition to prevail; but now that was to cease; the star that shone first in the East was to become visible throughout the habitable globe, and his everlasting radiance was to be manifested to all nations. 'Mercy and truth had met together, righteousness and peace had kissed each other,' and proclaimed a reconciled God and Father; and, for the furtherance of this precious declaration, had thus

peculiarly qualified those whom he destined first to proclaim it abroad.

"Behold the multitudes collected on account of the feast of Pentecost at Jerusalem. Strangers, speaking fifteen different languages, were assembled there; and when the miraculous event of the morning began to be known, they, together with the regular inhabitants, congregated together, and, to their utmost astonishment, heard one or the other of the inspired disciples proclaiming the wonderful works of God in a language familiar to themselves."

"Well," said Hyford, "it was a strange and wonderful miracle."

"It was, indeed," replied Mr. C——; "and the more it is considered, the more astonishing it appears. We who are aware of the incessant labour requisite for attaining the knowledge of any foreign language, can fully enter into it; and when we read of the toil and disadvantages under which our missionaries labour from the difference of language, we can appreciate the mercy and goodness which thus so eminently qualified the disciples for their arduous task. It loudly proclaimed peace and good-will to man; it burst the barriers that were raised against the admission of the Gospel of Jesus, and it plainly pointed out the means whereby God had ordained that Gospel should be spread. But while the strangers who understood the different languages were satisfied as to the truth of the miracle, the Jews themselves, who still regarded our Lord and his followers as impostors, tried to persuade others that they were all intoxicated, and in reply to the inquiry, 'What meaneth this?' answered, 'These men are full of new wine.' (Verses 12, 13.) Now that could not be, for at that time of the year, new wine could not be made, as the grapes were not ripe; but the expression means sweet or strong wine, which might have the effect. But Peter no sooner understood the shameful accusation than he stood forth, and particularly addressed the men of Judea and the dwellers at Jerusalem; while we have reason to believe, from the words of the fourteenth verse, that the eleven likewise addressed the strangers in their different languages. But we will follow Peter, who at once disclaimed the possibility of himself or brethren being intoxicated, because it was but the third hour of the day, or nine o'clock in the morning; and moreover, this being a peculiarly solemn feast, the Jews never ate or drank anything at so early a time of the day.

No, he at once declares it to be the fulfilment of the prophecy of God, the outpouring of the Spirit being especially bestowed for the benefit of the infant Church, and which, during the apostolic days, was vouchsafed in an extraordinary manner. By degrees this visible display of the Divine power was withdrawn ; but the regenerating, sanctifying influences of the Spirit of life, whereby alone men are made new creatures in Christ Jesus, still remain, and shall continue to do so until the end of time.

“ Having applied the prophecy to the case before them, the Apostle next proceeds to preach the truth as it is in Jesus. He first glanced at his faultless, holy life, and having spoken of him thus, proceeded to declare that, according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, they had taken and by wicked hands had crucified and slain him ; that thus the purposes of love, conceived in the depths of eternity, might be fulfilled, though the instruments employed were guilty of the most cruel murder. But though they had thus shed innocent blood, they were reminded that their victim had escaped all their malice ; he had finished his mighty work, ‘ had made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in an everlasting righteousness ;’ his task was accomplished, and having rested in the grave the appointed time, he burst the bands of death, and rose triumphant from the tomb, thus setting his seal to the glorious act of redemption.

“ All these wonders were fresh in the minds of the people ; and Peter hastened to prove, that under the influence of the same Holy Spirit, their favourite David had foretold the astonishing event, thus proving that the very Jesus whom God had raised up, and which they knew was an indisputable fact, was he of whom it was said, ‘ Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.’ ‘ Therefore,’ said the apostle, perfectly indifferent as to whether he pleased his hearers or not, ‘ therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.’ (Verse 36.) In an instant, as it were, he glances at the several offices of the Redeemer : ‘ that same Jesus,’ the Saviour crucified by them, offering himself as an atonement to save, to rescue all from the power of Satan and the dominion of sin ; made by the Almighty Father the ‘ Lord’ and Judge of the world ; King of kings, and Lord of lords, at the same time that he is ‘ Christ,’ the Anointed, the Prophet, Priest,

and Head of his people. All this is included in Peter's declaration; and the word was accompanied with power, for conviction seized upon the minds of the hearers; they felt accused by their own consciences; they saw the enormity of the crime whereof they had been guilty, and in the agony of self-reproach, cried out, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'" (Verse 37.)

"Ah, sir," said Hyford, "it certainly is a dreary moment when a man first discovers himself to be a sinner; when he feels the depth of sin that dwells within, and sees all his fine actions, of which he used to be so proud, just nothing, even worse than nothing; and then not knowing which way to turn, or how to act so as to please God. I can well understand these Jews crying out, 'What shall we do?' I remember when I said the same myself."

"Well, Mr. Hyford, and what then?" said Mr. C——, who liked to make the old man talk.

"Why, sir," he replied, "I hardly knew what to do. I felt I had lived all my life as if there was no God. I felt I had only mocked my dear Saviour when I repeated the Creed, and said I believed in him; and as for the Holy Spirit, who that moment was leading and teaching me, though I knew it not, I never so much even as thought of him. So no wonder I was all astray; for how can we even think a good thought of ourselves? We cannot, and I have found it out at last."

"You are right," replied Mr. C——; "and I wish it was a truth more generally discovered; but 'vain man would be wise,' and desires to be thought so, and capable of guiding and directing himself, though the Bible declares 'he is born as a wild ass's colt.' (Job xi. 12.) Blessed be God for bestowing upon us the gracious influences and guidance of his Holy Spirit," added Mr. C—— with animation; "it was all we wanted besides redemption, all that was necessary to lead us safely through the snares and trials, the temptations and difficulties, that a corrupt world, a deceitful heart, and wily tempter could throw in our way; and he who looks to him for assistance shall be certain to be more than conqueror, and to be a partaker of that rest which belongeth to the people of God. When the Lord the Spirit 'pricked' the heart of the people who listened to Peter, they exclaimed, 'What shall we do?' It was not the miracle they beheld, but the truth he preached, that went home, and became the means of their conversion. And so it is now: miracles have ceased, but wherever the

word of God is faithfully preached, his Spirit accompanies it with his life-giving influences, and it is the power of God unto salvation.

"When I enter the pulpit," continued Mr. C——, "I look around; my church is full; I often see strangers; their private character and conduct I do not know; but amongst my own dear people I see some whom I know to be living as without God in the world, some who are drunkards, Sabbath-breakers, mere formalists putting on their religion with their Sunday clothes, or in other words, professors having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. Must not all these be converted before they can enter the kingdom of heaven? and how are they to be converted? It is not by baptism: they *have* been baptized, and that has not done it, for they give evidence that they are still dead in trespasses and sins. No; another agency is required—the Spirit of Truth, whose power, associated with a faithful ministry, will work for the furtherance of his own mighty cause; and he will bring home the word into the heart, and cause the sinner to feel convinced of the practical necessity of that 'holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.' (Heb. xi. 14.)"

"My dear sir," said Mr. Lawrence, "it rejoices me to find how closely you follow the apostolic example of ascribing the success attendant upon your ministry to Him who alone causes you to preach the word with profit."

"How could I do otherwise, sir?" interrupted Mr. C——. "What have I that I have not received, or, in fact, any of us? The intellects wherewith we are blessed, our many and various talents, are all the gifts of our Divine Master, who will by-and-by come and demand of each of us what use we have made of them; and while he is gracious and merciful, will expect us to give an account of our stewardship. When any, therefore, would ask of me, 'What shall I do to be saved?' I would with Peter reply, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.' (Verses 38, 39.) The apostle at once strikes home; like John, he preaches repentance—that true godly sorrow for sin, which is produced by the Holy Spirit, and produces, first, sorrow for sin; secondly, hatred of sin; and thirdly, forsaking of

sin. This is true repentance; and as a sign thereof, he commands them to be baptized, that outwardly they might affirm their belief in Jesus as their Messiah and Lord, and become members of that Church which he came to establish, and which he left commandment with his apostles to build up. The promise, too, belonged to them and to their children: what promise? Even that he would make a covenant of peace with them, an everlasting covenant, and that he would be their God, and they should be his people: (Ezek. xxxvii. 26, 27.)

"And was not this command of love laid up for them in Jesus, who was the Promise given to Abraham, and repeated, from one period to another, to the prophets, all of whom anticipated his advent, while the outpouring of the Spirit was predicted by them also, and which was likewise fulfilled at the season they were celebrating? Unknown to himself, Peter also alluded to the gracious calling of the Gentiles, and which, as a Jew, he could not at that time comprehend. Truly, they were 'afar off,' but to them also was the word of salvation to be sent; and before many weeks elapsed, we find the apostles rejoicing together over the fact that 'to the Gentiles also the Lord had granted repentance unto life.'"

"What do you think is the meaning of the apostle's exhortation that those who listened to him should 'save themselves from that untoward generation,' Mr. C——?" demanded Mr. Martin.

"It means that they should come out from among them, and be separate," replied Mr. C——; "and this would prove an act of the utmost importance, both in a temporal and spiritual sense; for while spiritually the apostle taught them they could not serve God and Mammon, in a temporal point of view it would be for their life to withdraw from that ungodly nation upon whom the vengeance of God was about to be poured down, and when his own people alone would be shielded by Omnipotence, and enabled to reach the shelter his mercy had provided for them."

"You allude to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, and the asylum the Christians found in the little city of Pella?" said Mr. Martin.

"I do," replied Mr. C——. "Protected by their heavenly Father, not one was lost during that awful time: the Lord Jesus had declared that not a hair of their heads should perish, and his promise was amply fulfilled, while

on the present occasion he inclined the people to give heed to the exhortation of his servant, and by his grace caused no less than three thousand persons to hear and receive the word of life. Though their conversion was sudden," continued Mr. C——, "it was sincere; they were led by the Spirit of God to become the sons of God, and He who had begun the good work would continue and carry it on unto the end. Consequently, they were enabled to continue steadfast in the faith, diligently attending to the apostolic instruction they received, and in breaking of bread, whereby we understand partaking of the memorials of their Saviour's dying love, and which appears frequently to have been administered in these early ages. The impression all these events gave rise to was very great; the power bestowed upon the apostles filled the minds of men with fear, which, united with the death and resurrection of Jesus, perplexed all who witnessed it, while the holy life of the new converts tended to increase respect for the religion they professed, and to induce others also to join them and be made partakers of eternal life. Oh, may the Lord the Spirit visit in like manner his people now, that pouring out his grace upon ministers and people, such numbers may from time to time be added to his Church, that the glorious period may ere long arrive when 'He will destroy the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations,' inclining them to submit to his dominion and to exclaim 'Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.' (Isa. xxv. 7, 9.)"

With these words the pastor closed his book, and took leave of his attentive audience.

No. 39. N. T.]

TRACTS

ON THE

NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,

AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

The Healing of the Cripple.



LONDON:
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THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

HYFORD was particularly thoughtful when he returned from the Court, after he had been listening to Mr. C——'s account of the day of Pentecost ; the confusion of tongues at Babel, occasioning such fearful consequences for hundreds of years, so mercifully cancelled by the Gift of Tongues, through the immediate influence of the Lord and Spirit, filled him with wonder and gratitude, as affording a new instance of the love of God and the faithfulness of Jesus, who promised, when he ascended up on high, to send down the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, to dwell in the hearts of his redeemed ones, to teach and guide them, and, by dwelling in them and with them, to lead them onwards unto glory. In the conversion of the multitude that were convinced by Peter boldly accusing them of the crucifixion of Jesus, he saw the whole plan of gospel love ; amongst these men were, undoubtedly, some who had cried "Crucify him, crucify him ;" and now we behold them bowing before him as their Saviour and their God—he saw all this, and then he understood what his teacher had often endeavoured to explain, viz. that the Almighty Father gave them to the Son, who redeemed and purchased them by his sacrifice of himself, but that they were still dead in trespasses and sins until the Spirit's influence, poured down upon them, enabled them first to feel they were sinners, and then to believe in Jesus, and to know that he whom they had crucified, was both Lord and Christ. All this the worthy farmer understood, and found it comparatively easy ; the great plan of salvation is sufficiently plain for a little child, or the most ignorant person to comprehend ; while, on the other hand, the worldling, however great, or rich, or lofty he may be,

will find it so difficult and incomprehensible that he will give himself no trouble concerning it, and live in hopes that when he dies all will be well.

"Is not the day of Pentecost the same as Whit-Sunday, father?" said Betsey.

"Yes, my child," replied Hyford; "what then?"

"Because, father," she replied, "I was thinking if it was such a holy time as you say, it seems very strange that there should be so much rioting and merry-making just then: you know, most of the clubs walk on Whit-Monday."

"I know it," replied her father, "and I have thought much about it since last Wednesday, when we were at the Court: it is not right: it is not the proper way of celebrating God's great mercies to his Church. But look out, Betsey, and see who Bran is barking at."

"It is at me, Mr. Hyford," said Mr. C——, who entered with the farmer's daughter; "he did not choose to let me in this evening; I suppose he did not think I had any business here now, as it is not my proper day."

"Very likely, sir," said the worthy farmer, laughing; "Bran admires regularity; but he forgets his master's dearest friend and teacher is always welcome; and never more so than at this moment, when Betsey and I were talking about Pentecost. Is it the same as Whitsuntide, sir?"

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "and the word is derived from *Whitesunday* tide or time. In the early ages of the Church, they used, if possible, to administer the rite of baptism more frequently at Easter and Whitsunday than at any other season; and upon these occasions the parties were dressed in white as an emblem of purity."

"Then why, sir, should Whitsuntide be the time for the clubs to be so gaily showing themselves almost all over the country, sir? it does not seem consistent."

"That is very true," replied Mr. C——; "but we find that many of the festivals which in the early ages of Christianity were kept with religious holiness, have gradually become the appointed seasons of vanity and sin. Oh! how different will it be by-and-by," added Mr. C——, "when the Lord Jesus at the head of his Church shall dwell in the midst of his redeemed: when their services will be spiritual and holy; and, as in the days of Pentecost, great grace shall be upon all. 'And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the

nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And the Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day there shall be one Lord, and his name one." (Zech. xiv. 16, 9.)

"Yes, sir," replied the old man, "that will be, indeed, a glorious time; one that is delightful to think of: how true it is what you tell us, that we must first be prepared here below, otherwise we could not enjoy the employments of heaven."

"No," replied Mr. C——, "'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither can corruption inherit incorruption;' and what is said of the body refers also to the soul. No unregenerate, unsanctified person 'hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.' The power and attraction of sin must be parted with. We must be adopted into our heavenly Father's family here, if we would dwell in his presence for evermore—hence in reality eternal life begins here. Even as our Lord says, 'He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, *hath* everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.' (John v. 24.) But it is getting late," said Mr. C—— rising; "to-morrow, my good friend, I hope we shall meet at my house."

At the usual hour the party assembled, and as the pastor opened his book he said, "The events I have selected for our consideration to-day, appear to have quickly followed the wonders of Pentecost, and were further confirmatory of the Divine mission of the Apostles. We read 'that Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.' (Acts iii. 1.) This was at three in the afternoon, the daily services of the temple being celebrated at nine and at three, at which time the morning and evening sacrifices of a lamb, offered with incense daily, smoked upon the sacred altar. Beautiful type of Jesus the Lamb of God, who must be daily applied to by us as our sacrifice and atonement, and the incense of whose merits can alone render us and our imperfect services acceptable before the throne of God. The Apostles entered the court of the sacred edifice, and just as they were passing through the principal gate, they beheld a miserable crippled object, with fearfully distorted limbs, who had been so from his birth. He was daily, by the kindness of others, laid at this

entrance, in the hope of obtaining charity from those who went in to worship. But before we proceed with our history," continued Mr. C——, "we must notice the epithet bestowed upon this temple gate. It was known by the name of 'Beautiful,' which the Jewish historian, Josephus, describes as having been beautiful in the extreme. Though nine of the gates, he tells us, were completely covered with gold and silver, they were not nearly so much esteemed as this one, which was of Corinthian brass, of exquisite workmanship, and thick plates of gold and silver. It was upwards of fifteen yards high, and eight wide, with an ascent of fifteen steps up to it. It is supposed to have separated the court of the Gentiles from the inner court; and just before the destruction of Jerusalem, it opened of its own accord in the night. Those who kept watch in the temple saw it, and told the captain, who went with several men, and did not shut it again without great difficulty. The miserable Jews, blind to their own situation, and unconscious of the swift approach of overwhelming vengeance, flattered themselves that this occurrence was an omen of happiness. But the wiser men among them understood it truly, when they declared that the security of this holy house was dissolved, and the open gate was a sign of the desolation that was coming upon them, and the entrance of their enemies within their walls. In the days of the Apostles, at the time our chapter opens, it stood there in all its gorgeous magnificence, requiring twenty men daily to open it; and being the most frequented of all the entrances, was a fitting reason why the poor cripple should give it the preference. As one after another passed through he begged for relief, and repeated the request when Peter and John were about to pass him; but no sooner had he excited their attention, than 'Peter fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, Look on us.' Fully expecting the usual donation of coin, he earnestly anticipated it; but in this he was disappointed, though a blessing not to be purchased was in store for him, for the Apostle added, 'Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.' (Verse 6.) Of this world's wealth the disciples of Christ were deficient: they were mostly poor, earning their bread; and oftentimes dependent upon the bounty and kindness of their more wealthy friends: but they had the great and mighty gifts of healing, of casting

out devils, and of teaching bestowed upon them, which rendered them blessings to the world, and compared with which, all that mines of gold could bestow would be utterly worthless. And this is an encouragement to God's children in every place: each, according to his means, may prove a blessing in his generation. They may not have money to bestow, they may not be able to contribute to this benevolent institution or that society, but they may give their time, or if that is occupied in the works of their calling, though, with management, every one has a portion they may call their own, they may give their prayers; yes, and those, too, are valuable, for the 'effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,' and the prayer of faith is precious. But," added Mr. C——, "the old saying is, 'Where there is a will, there is a way;' and I know the farmer's wife, who has the care and management of a large family; and by rising earlier in the morning, finds time to do all her household work, not the least particle omitted, and yet to visit the sick, to see to the wants of the poor, to attend to the weekly ministry of God's word, in a word, to be a blessing to her generation. And why should she be a solitary instance? If her example was multiplied, how the hands of the minister and the wealthier portions of his flock would be strengthened, and how wonderfully would the Word of God increase and be multiplied! We are often reminded that the age of miracles has ceased; and this is true as far as the bodies of men are concerned, but the conversion of a sinner from death to life is as great a marvel now as ever. The Lord the Spirit can alone produce the effect; but generally he works by means, he employs his servants, he puts words in their mouth which he renders effectual, and continually employs them in the vast and glorious work of winning souls for heaven. A friend of mine was told by a woman years after the circumstance happened, that it was hearing him read and explain the 'Parable of the Ten Virgins,' that first induced her to think of eternity: and I lately had the account of a most interesting girl of seventeen, who was led to search the Bible from hearing a lady repeat the text, 'Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that called upon the Lord, and that thought upon his name.' (Mal. iii. 16.) She died not long ago, full of faith, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God; another seal added

to the labours of this faithful and active servant of the Lord, for she is one who spares not herself, so that she may win souls for Christ. But we must not forget our cripple—when Peter pronounced the healing words, ‘In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk,’ he took him by the right hand, the word was accompanied by power, for he lifted him up ; he was imbued with the will, strength was instantly bestowed, his crippled limbs were straightened, and his ‘feet and ancle-bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God : and they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple : and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.’ (Verses 7—10.)

“Why, sir,” said Hyford, “any one would suppose they had never seen a miracle performed before ; and yet, I expect, most of these people had seen or heard of the wonderful miracles of Jesus.”

“No doubt,” replied Mr. C——, “but what a proof this wonder and amazement is of the hardness of the heart. These Jews had seen the miracles of Jesus, and were astonished at them ; but for the most part, they worked themselves up into the belief that he was an impostor ; and that of necessity, when he was dead and buried, all his power was over. But when it was well known that he had again risen, and that wonderful gifts immediately sent from heaven were bestowed upon his followers, accompanied by the evidence that they could likewise heal diseases, they were perplexed and confounded, and the religion of Jesus Christ derived increased stability from the fresh evidence brought before them. But the language of David has been that of God’s people ever, ‘Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake.’ (Psalm cxv. 1.) The Apostles disclaimed all power in themselves, and demanded of the Jews why they should be so surprised at what they had seen. ‘Ye men of Israel,’ said Peter, ‘why marvel ye at this ? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk ?’” (Acts iii. 12.)

“How completely this verse destroys the doctrine of human merits,” observed Mr. Lawrence ; “if any men could arrogate spiritual superiority, surely it would have

been those you are speaking of, Mr. C——; they had companied with Jesus, the Lord of Life, from the beginning of his ministry to the end; they had been chosen especially to attend him on the Mount of Transfiguration, to be witnesses both of his resurrection and ascension; and privileges such as these were what few could boast of. But see their humility; it was not by their might or their goodness, but by the power of the living God. Oh, how well it would be if their example were now followed! and then the doctrine of human merits would cease to be brought up."

"Very true," replied Mr. C——; "I often think of the judgment upon Herod, (see Acts xii. 23,) when I hear undue praise bestowed upon the creature. We have nothing but what has been bestowed upon us; we cannot express a right sentence, we cannot think a holy thought, unless influenced and taught by the Spirit from above. And it chills my very heart to hear one poor human being ascribe to another, talents, abilities, and virtues, that in one instant he might be deprived of, and, like the proud King of Babylon, be rendered on a level with the beasts of the field. Peter hastened to lead the wondering multitudes to Jesus: 'The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob,' said he, 'the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus.' This was the great end of everything; and every portion of scripture is directed to this one grand object, to glorify Jesus. In him the love of Jehovah was manifested; and before the foundation of the world, the mighty scheme of salvation was marked out that Jesus might be glorified. The ordinances and sacrifices of the law pointed to him; and he is at once the Divine Head, the gracious Mediator, the Prophet, Priest, and King of his Church, his redeemed ones; and the day is coming when every knee shall bow to him, and every tongue confess that he is King of kings and Lord of lords. And what shall I say more, my people? Can I add to this? Yes. When this great and mighty Jehovah condescends to dwell in the heart of the humble contrite sinner, who is brought to his footstool, and enabled to rest simply upon him and his finished work for salvation, then another jewel is added to the Redeemer's crown, another trophy of his victory is seen over Satan, sin, and death. Thus God glorified Jesus notwithstanding the malice of the Jews, who denied and hated him, and desired a murderer to be given in his stead. But though they

thought nothing of him, and tried to put away his remembrance from amongst them, the unfailing mercy of God, the God of their fathers, would not permit it; for again he is manifested unto them in the power granted to his Apostles. When Peter had shown the people the sin whereof they had been guilty; first, in rejecting Christ as the true Messiah, and then putting him to death, he proceeded to excuse their sinful conduct: 'And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.' Yes, but it was an ignorance that proceeded from pride and prejudice. Had they known him to be the Lord of Glory, it is certain they would not have crucified him; but, as it was, they hated him on account of the purity of his doctrines, the holiness and simplicity of his life, which cast such reflections upon themselves, and the internal righteousness he preached. All this conspired to determine them to put him to death; which, while it fulfilled the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, was nevertheless a great and fearful crime, and, unrepented of, would call down the most fearful vengeance upon their heads, fill up the measure of their iniquities, and end in their utter and complete destruction. 'Repent ye therefore,' adds the Apostle, 'and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.'" (Verse 19.)

"How beautiful the meaning attached to the expression, blotted out!" said Mrs. Basil.

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "it at once expresses the efficacy of the Redeemer's blood. In the figurative language of Scripture it is often implied that our sins are written down, that they are recorded against us. To have them blotted out also implies that they no longer appear against us. The blood of Jesus Christ has washed them away; hence the believer is pardoned and accepted on his account. The Apostle next declares, that, consistent with the declarations of the prophets, his Lord would come again and restore all things to himself; but though he spoke of the event, still he did not understand then so fully as afterwards the meaning of what he said. In common with his nation, he was anticipating their restoration to power and glory, and a return of the golden age of Solomon; but before that period could arrive, the Gentiles were to become fellow-heirs of the grace of life, the middle wall of partition was to be broken down, and

all, both Jews and Gentiles, were to be one flock under one shepherd, even the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

"This glorious truth Peter had yet to learn, and an immediate revelation from heaven was necessary to destroy his prejudices, and induce him to think that to the Gentiles also was granted repentance unto life. But on the present occasion his mission was confined to his own immediate brethren, therefore he strengthened his argument by every means in his power, and brought forward their favourite Moses to prove that he also had foretold of Jesus, and threatened destruction to all who rejected him."

"But they thought that Jesus came to set the precepts of Moses aside," said Mr. Basil.

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "their zeal and ignorance kept pace together. They were the children of the prophets, the descendants of those to whom the law, the covenant of works was committed, and with whom another and far better covenant was entered into, even that covenant of grace which, in the person of the Redeemer, proclaims a free pardon to sinners, and opens the door of heaven wide to all. But this they could not comprehend. The veil was before their hearts; and their minds were blinded in order to fulfil all that the word of the Lord had spoken, that through their obstinate rejection of the Messiah, salvation might come to us Gentiles; that, consequently, we might also be engrafted into the true olive-tree, and be made with them partakers of the goodness and mercy of God."

"In the last verse of this chapter," said Mr. Martin, looking at his Bible, "there is a remarkable expression: I do not quite understand it, Mr. C——. You know," added he, "I require much instruction; for until my friend Mr. Lawrence introduced me to you, I truly can say, 'I cared for none of these things;' but thought them well enough for old or sick people. I have begun to find out they are equally important to all; and that he is the truly happy man who 'uses this world without abusing it,' and who has come to Jesus Christ, feeling his need of him, and that there is salvation in no other."

"I rejoice you have found it so, sir," said Mr. C——; "believe me this is that true discovery which tends to life, and produces the peace that is incomprehensible to the worldling, but which, once possessed, the happy recipient would never part with. What is the sentence you alluded to?"

"In the 26th verse," replied Mr. Martin, "the Apostle, still addressing the Jews, said, 'Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you.' How did God *send* Jesus?"

"In a twofold manner," replied Mr. C——. "First, by promise. From the moment he declared to Adam in paradise his gracious intention, the divine Saviour was as good as actually sent. The skins wherewith our naked guilty first parents were clothed, were taken from beasts slain in sacrifice; significantly showing how the sinner must be covered, not with the scanty robe of his own weaving, or in other words, of his own self-wrought righteousness; but with the righteousness of him who was wounded for his transgressions, and bruised for his iniquities. Again we read the same precious truth in the acceptance of Abel's lamb, and the rejection of Cain's deficient offering; in the ark of Noah, emblem of the refuge prepared for all who desire to find safety from the wrath of a justly angry God, and which the beauteous rainbow confirmed; in the promise made to Abraham and Jacob, and the oath that he swore unto Isaac, and to which the deliverance of Israel from Egypt pointed; as well as the various deliverances and mercies bestowed upon them during their wanderings, united with their innumerable holy services, which were all a shadow of good things to come, whereof the body was Christ. Thus you see," continued Mr. C——, "the Old Testament believers had the coming Saviour set before them almost as plainly as we have who *know* that he has appeared; for, secondly, the New Testament confirms the promises of the Old, and says, 'When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.' (Gal. iv. 4, 5.) And again we are told, that that was the 'salvation the prophets had inquired and searched diligently about, who prophesied of the grace that should come: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow;' (1 Peter i. 10, 11;) and which they saw through a glass darkly, but which we are enabled through grace fully to comprehend. Yea, I believe the promise of the Saviour perplexed the angels themselves, and that they could not understand his humiliation. Now, Mr. Martin," added

the pastor, "you see how God sent Jesus,—and for what ? —'to bless us.' How ? First, by purchasing a blessing for us ; and secondly, by applying it to us."

"Please to explain us more, sir," said Hyford. "You are got beyond me and my poor capacity."

"Well, then," said Mr. C—— smiling, "I am sorry for that ; but I will soon make it plainer. The great blessing which Christ has purchased for us is his Spirit, whereby we are convinced of sin, or in other words converted, and led to him for mercy, pardon, reconciliation, and peace—'peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ,' and after all—heaven ; for 'through him we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.' (Heb. x. 19, 20.) Thus truly he has blessed us, and permitted us to draw near to him by faith in prayer ; no more as strangers and foreigners, but as fellow-citizens of the saints and of the household of God : and, I am certain, this, my good friend, you fully comprehend, and will no longer complain that I am getting beyond your comprehension."

"No, no, sir," said Hyford, "I understand this well enough, for my spirit bears witness to its truth. Our dear Lord has purchased all the blessings you have mentioned, and more too ; and he seems never weary of bestowing them upon us. In former days I never thought of my blessings ; now I cannot think of them enough. I see God in all his works, both of creation and redemption ; and every day gives me some fresh cause for adoration and gratitude, either as it respects myself and family, and the blessing that seems to attend our honest industry ; or when I compare myself with others, and say, 'John, how is it ? Why art thou different ? why dost thou not live in folly and madness as formerly ?' Yes, sir, I often talk thus to myself, even at the risk of being thought a little flighty," added the old man laughing, "but I cannot help it ; my heart is full, and I must give it vent."

"Do, Mr. Hyford," said Mr. C——, "and thus obey the Apostolic injunction after your own fashion, which tells us to 'speak to ourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs ;' and may he who compasses your path be with you, and cause you to realize much of his presence."

No. 40. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,

AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

The Apostles Threatened.



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THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

"I HAVE been looking over the chapter I expect you intend reading to-day, sir," said our loquacious old friend, Hyford; "I see the heads of the people could not let the Apostles alone. Well, when we think of it, it was no great wonder either, for they must have been sorely vexed that the religion of our blessed Lord should appear to spread faster and faster, notwithstanding their having put him to death, and used all the means they could to check its progress."

"Very true," replied Mr. C——; "it seems that while they were engaged in instructing the people, as we read last week, and had succeeded in fixing their attention, the priests, together with the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came and interrupted them. The priesthood, as we have seen, was always the most inveterate against Jesus, for they deeply hated him, because he 'testified to them that their works were evil.' The captain of the temple is by some said to have been one of themselves, whose office it was to preside over the Levites that constantly attended there, and who kept watch in twenty-one places, while the priests watched in three, over each of whom was a chief, all of whom were under the dominion of one who was especially called the 'captain.' Others there are who think that this was a Roman commander, and that he was captain of the guard, or garrison, which was placed in the tower of Antonia for the guard of the temple."

"What tower did you say, sir?" said Hyford.

"Antonia," replied Mr. C——. "This tower stood at the north-east corner of the wall, and was first built by Hyrcanus, the high-priest, for a dwelling for himself, and also for a place of safety for the holy garments when he

had taken them off. Herod repaired it, and called it Antonia, in honour of Antony, one of the Roman rulers : he fortified it that it might be a protection to the temple, and during his reign, and that of Archelaus, his son, the holy robes were laid up there. After Archelaus was removed from his kingdom, it was garrisoned by the Romans, under the command of a captain ; and this Roman united with the priests and the Sadducees, to put down the religion of Jesus, proving the truth of the Scripture which said, ‘Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.’ (Psalm ii. 1—3.) Jews and Gentiles, persecutors of every nation and description, have but the one feeling of regret, namely, that precepts so holy, so opposed to the natural heart and disposition, should spread and gain disciples in the world ; they quarrel with the Lord Jehovah, and his Anointed, and against all who love and serve them, and use every means to check the increase of the Redeemer’s kingdom.”

“Well ! I know that to be true,” said Hyford, “for I am ashamed to say that the time was when I did my best to check the progress of religion in this parish ; and indeed, sir, it is much easier to do that than to push it forward. Men are ready enough to follow what is wrong—that is their nature ; but, oh ! how difficult it is to induce them to practise what is right.”

“True,” replied Mr. C—— ; “hence the anxiety of the priests and rulers to oppose the preaching of the Gospel ; they thought, by so doing the common people would again be submissive to them as their natural teachers, and forget the precepts of the holy Jesus and his Apostles. But what is man that he should defy the gracious purposes of the living God ? The kings and the rulers of the earth may rage, and plan a thousand absurdities, but ‘he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision ;’ for notwithstanding all the opposition of earth and hell, Jesus, the King of his church and people, is set upon his holy hill of Zion, and he shall reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The priests, who hated the purity of the Gospel ; the Sadducees, who denied a future resurrection ; the heathen Romans, who feared for the worship of their idols ; all determined by violence

to check the progress of the new faith, but in vain: many which heard the word believed, and the infant church could now number five thousand members more; for though some think this was the total amount of the converts, I am disposed to agree with those who say that by thus recording the different numbers of those who believed unto the saving of their souls, the Holy Spirit desired to show how truly his word came with power, and how irresistible was his grace."

"And a blessed meaning this is to put upon it," said Mr. Lawrence; "'I will work,' saith God, 'and who shall let it?' (Isa. xliii. 13.) 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts,' (Zech. iv. 6;) and truly the effects of the preaching of the Gospel in the chapter before us was only an earnest of that glorious harvest which from that period has been daily reaped throughout the world. 'For all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.' But pray proceed."

"It appears," continued Mr. C——, "that the detention of the Apostles lasted until the following day, when Annas the high priest, and all the principal members of his family, collected together, and commanded the Apostles to be brought into their presence. Depending upon their superiority, and the respect they usually met with, they were annoyed beyond measure that men of such inferior rank should thus presume to trouble them; they therefore demanded of them, 'By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?' (Acts iv. 7.) Their hard, cold hearts could not understand; had they been unprejudiced, they must have known that from God alone they could derive such a gift, and that the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth was sufficient to enable the poor cripple to stand upright on his feet, and be a living testimony to the truth of the divine Saviour's word and mission. Only a few weeks had elapsed, and he had been travelling throughout the length and breadth of the land himself, 'healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease;' he had caused 'the blind to see and the lame to walk;' and he was the 'stone' which was set at nought and rejected by the Jews, but which, in defiance of all their opposition, had, according to the words of David, become the 'head of the corner,' (Psalm cxviii. 22,) the support of the great spiritual temple he was erecting, and that glorious corner-stone whereby Jew and Gentile should be for ever united, and consequently the line of separation which

had hitherto divided them, be destroyed for ever. 'Yes, the appearance of the Redeemer has completely altered all things; he has revealed the true nature and character of God; he has opened the arms of his mercy and love equally to all, to every one, and cried, 'Come unto me, and ye shall live.' And the words of Peter contain the sum of the Gospel when he says, 'Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.' (Verse 12.) No other road to heaven but Jesus; 'he is the way, the truth, and the life;' all other paths are false, they lead to destruction. The pilgrim to Zion must keep in the strait, narrow path; he must not turn aside, but he must walk steadily on in the road marked out for him in God's word, and of which it is said, 'that the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein.' (Isa. xxxv. 8.)

"Blessed be God," exclaimed Hyford with energy; "and I have found that way. When you first told me of it, sir, I could not find it out; I could not understand it; but now I do: I have discovered that Jesus Christ is the alone way to heaven, and that believing in him, and his finished work of atonement, I shall never perish, for this is the plan of salvation marked out by himself, and I read in his word, 'All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.' (John vi. 37.) Now I am *sure* he will not, for did he not die on purpose to purchase our souls, when nothing else could save them from being lost? I do believe," added the old man, "that our dear Saviour is ready to receive all—every body that has ever lived—and that he is not willing for one to perish. The lost, therefore, have no one to blame but themselves; and surely this thought must increase their misery."

"Truly it does," replied Mr. C——; "the precious Gospel is offered to all, and thrice happy those who are induced to receive it. Peter and John had discovered its inestimable value, and therefore they ceased to set any price upon their lives, if they might but be enabled faithfully to proclaim it. Well might the learned and arrogant priesthood wonder; they perceived, perhaps, something in their manner, that they were not polished according to the fashion of this world; but the simplicity of their words and the plain truths they uttered took them by surprise, and after a little time they discovered that they had been the constant companions of Jesus.

“My dear friends,” added Mr. C——, “would that it may be said of each of us, that it is easy to discern that we too hold sweet communion with Jesus. If his grace rests upon us—and if we ask for it, we shall have it—then we shall indeed prove that we are his; the sincerity of our profession will be manifested, not in word only, but in deed and in truth; and in all our intercourse with men we shall let our light so shine before them, that they will glorify our heavenly Father, who has thus made us partakers of his grace. It is curious to see how continually a holy, upright, truly consistent character, is in reality respected: yes, even by the complete worldling. If he is in trouble, it is to the Christian he turns for comfort; if he is perplexed, he knows the Christian will give him disinterested advice; if he is sick, the Christian will visit him when his own friends and companions forsake him; if he is poor, the Christian will forget self to relieve his wants, for he endeavours to imitate the example of his Lord, who without respect of persons went about doing good; and in how many instances have the most violent opposers to the truth been compelled to acknowledge its loveliness and power, from the gentle and consistent conduct they have observed in some whom they formerly despised.”

“It is very amusing,” observed Mr. Martin, “to see the annoyance and perplexity of the priesthood in this business.”

“It is,” replied Mr. C——; “it is such an exact picture of a set of worldly rulers who fear for their own power and authority. There was the man, no longer a cripple, standing with the Apostles; there also were numbers of the people, attentive spectators of what was going on, and already convinced by the plain and simple truths declared by Peter, that Jesus, whom the priests were so desirous to condemn as an impostor, was in deed and in truth the long-promised Messiah. Well might they be provoked; for, like other false teachers, ‘they perceived their craft was in danger,’ and that soon the dominion they had so long maintained over the minds of the people would cease.”

“This reminds me,” said Mr. Lawrence, “of the glorious work now going on in Italy. A letter lately received from thence says, ‘that it is wonderful to see how the numbers of believers are increasing, and how numerous are the true conversions to Christ;’ and the writer adds,

‘that he thinks the time is near when the number of those who openly profess the truth will be so great, that the government will be obliged to tolerate them.’ How similar is this state of things to that in the chapter you are reading, sir, and how powerfully does the hatred, the ignorance, and wilful blindness of the Jewish priesthood to the simple Gospel of the Lord Jesus, resemble the character and conduct of the Roman teachers of the present day. But, thank God, all is vain. He has a people chosen for himself, and when he says, ‘Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues,’ (Rev. xviii. 4,) he will accompany the summons with his grace, and multitudes born in the thralldom of Popery shall burst their bonds and fly to the God revealed in the Bible, from the knowledge of whom they have been shut out; for it is a certain fact that the Bible and Popery cannot dwell together, and that a man no sooner reads the word of God with a desire to take it for a guide, than all his Popish errors vanish, and the Church of Rome loses a subject. I should have told you,” added Mr. Lawrence, “that the writer of the letter I have mentioned said ‘that from the first of January to the first of May in this year, ten Bibles a day had been sold in the city he was in, and that the demand was daily increasing.’ This proves the truth of what I said, that the Bible and Popery cannot exist together.”

“Very true, sir,” said Mr. C——; “there is but ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.’ (Eph. iv. 5, 6.) And all who would seek to enter into life by any other way than that which is revealed, shall find himself wofully mistaken, and be taken and punished as a thief and a robber. But human nature does not approve this doctrine; it likes to mark out a path more consistent with its tastes and pleasures; hence the enmity ever attached to the simple preaching of the cross, and which was openly exhibited by Annas and his friends. Thoroughly perplexed by the boldness and independence of the Apostles, they commanded them to leave the council-room that they might confer together. ‘What shall we do,’ said they, ‘to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell at Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it.’” (Acts iv. 16.)

"Why, what did they want to do!" said Hyford; "put them to death, I suppose; that is, if they had dared to do so."

"Yes," replied Mr. C——; "they would have rejoiced to have effectually silenced them, but this their heavenly Father would not permit; they were boldly to proclaim his name, and to win many souls to glory, before their task on earth should be completed. Upon this occasion, therefore, their judges were compelled to treat them with leniency, for they contented themselves with merely threatening them, and commanding them not to speak at all in the name of Jesus. (Verse 18.) With this they were dismissed; and then, we are told, they went to their own company, and reported all that had passed.

"How truly," continued Mr. C——, "that old saying holds good in all ages,—'I will tell you what sort of man such an one is by the company he keeps.' Here we find the two sets of men in strong contrast; Annas, and Caiaphas, and those who were of the same opinion and principle, kept together, and exerted all their power short of violence to suppress the increase of the Christian faith; the Apostles, on the other hand, bold and fearless in professing Jesus, patiently suffered what was inflicted upon them, and then used their liberty by returning to the society of their beloved friends, whom they joined in praises to Him who had brought them out of darkness into light, and from the power of Satan to the service of the living God. Their praises were succeeded by prayer, imploring grace whereby they might be emboldened to speak the word with faithfulness, and give evidence of its truth by the miracles they would be enabled to perform. Immediately they were favoured with a proof of their petition being heard, 'for the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and spake the word of God with boldness.' (Verse 31.)

"Upheld by Omnipotence, and strengthened from above, they cared for no man; the thunders of the priesthood were unheeded, and their threats fell harmless; their Great Master had testified his approval of their conduct, and they owed allegiance to none other. But we must proceed, and observe the bond of union that characterised the Christian converts; it says, 'that the multitude were of one heart and one soul.'" (Verse 32.)

"I wish," interrupted Hyford, "this could be said of

God's people now ; but, truly, they are of as many minds as there are points in the compass, and we seldom meet with two folks that think alike."

"And why is this, think you, Master Hyford?" said Mr. Basil.

"I do not exactly know, sir," said Hyford ; "but I fancy it is because they forget to look at their map to the heavenly country ; they keep it in their pockets, and satisfy themselves too much with the opinions and directions of others, and the consequence is, one says one thing, and another something else, and so all get wrong together."

"That the simple Bible is not sufficiently heeded, I perfectly agree with you," said Mr. C—— ; "instead of reading that Holy Book as children feeling their need of direction, men are too apt to make their interpretation of its truths agree with their own preconceived opinions ; hence one person interprets a text one way, another, perhaps, totally different, and instead of seeking the teaching of the Lord the Spirit, who alone can unfold its hidden meaning, and thus instruct them both, they begin to dispute and quarrel, and forget they are members of the same family, and branches of the same living Vine. 'Union is strength,' and were Christians to forget the petty differences that subsist between them, and with one heart and one mind unite against every error that is opposed to the furtherance of the Gospel of Jesus, how different would be the religious state of our country. If, instead of Churchmen being jealous of Dissenters, and Dissenters of Churchmen, all should unite in the one glorious object of spreading the Gospel, and enforcing its precepts by their example, how would the love and harmony of heaven be anticipated ! for surely there are no lines of demarcation drawn to divide one class of believers from another there, but all are one in Christ Jesus.

"The union mentioned in our chapter," continued Mr. C——, "soon met with a rupture. Human nature will bring forwards its corruptions, which, though kept under by grace, are never destroyed or cast out as long as we are in the body. We find St. Paul rebuking his Corinthian converts for the very error I have just been speaking of. One declared himself a follower of Paul, another of Apollos, another of Cephas, or Peter, and another of Christ. (1 Cor. i. 12.) And this called forth his just indignation, for, says he, 'Is Christ divided ? was Paul crucified for you ?' Oh ! my friends, what folly it is !

it is like the children of a large family all pulling different ways, (and we know the consequence of that,) or a nation setting up for itself an infinite variety of leaders, professing to follow one supreme head, but, in fact, all trying to oppose each other, and thus destroying the importance and power of the kingdom at large. Would that it were said of us as of the primitive disciples,—‘Behold how these Christians love one another.’ Be persuaded to bring every doctrine, every difficulty, to the test of the Bible. ‘What doth God say?’ let this be your constant inquiry, and then I need not fear for you, for all will go well both for time and eternity. While the multitude of the disciples were thus united by a bond of love and harmony such as never has since existed, they showed it also in their liberality one towards the other, ‘for none said that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.’” (Verse 32.)

“Do you think, Mr. C——,” said Mr. Martin, “that this is recorded for our imitation?”

“I do not,” replied Mr. C——; “we must consider the state of the church at this time; it was in its infancy, its members had all been converted from the darkness of heathenism or Jewish error, and the days of persecution were at hand. Thus did God provide for the coming trials of his people, that by equalizing their possessions the poor members should not fall away by reason of their poverty, or the rich be led astray by their worldly goods, but each assisting the other, should become a mutual benefit and support. It cannot properly be taken for an example or precedent for other ages, because the state of the church, as it existed then, can never again return. Besides, many of the converts who had possessions in distant lands found them of no advantage, as they determined to remain with the Apostles. Barnabas was one of this description; his property lay in the island of Cyprus, and as he became so eminent afterwards as to be named an apostle, (see Acts xiv. 14,) of what use would his property be, when situated so distantly? We can quite understand his selling it, and bringing the money to the Apostles that they might distribute it according to their discretion amongst the poorer brethren. There was another reason, also, why this community of property was particularly appropriate. The disciples never forgot the prophecy on Mount Olivet; they knew that the awful day was fast approaching when the tribulation and wrath

their Lord had foretold should descend upon their country, and that in the universal destruction of property their's also would be swept away ; by selling it, therefore, they provided for themselves and others, and became free of the cares and anxieties that would otherwise have overwhelmed them."

"How true it is," observed Mrs. Basil, "that this world's goods often cause more anxiety to Christians than they are worth.

"Too true," answered Mr. C—— ; "they are the thorns that continually choke the word and render it unfruitful ; but the duty and wisdom of the child of God is to sit light to all earthly possessions, to cast his burdens upon the Lord, and to use the world as not abusing it, ready to give it up as soon as he receives his summons to depart and enter into the joy of his Lord. And this reminds me of a beautiful little story I remember reading, of a little boy who had the misfortune to lose his mother, whom he fondly loved. He had visited the chamber where she lay as a corpse, and upon seeing his playthings scattered about, he exclaimed, 'Who will have them ? I want them no longer, for I am going to my mother in heaven.' And does not every departing Christian say the same ? When he feels his time is at hand, and the desire of his soul about to be realized, he says of all sublunary things,—'Who will have them ? they have long ceased to be valuable in my eyes, and now they are worthless, for I am going to my Father in heaven.'"

"What an effect the holy conduct and self-denial of the converts must have had upon the heathen spectators!" observed Mr. Lawrence.

"Yes," replied Mr. C—— ; "it is the consistency of the true Christian that marks his profession. Many cry 'Lord, Lord,' and yet in works deny him ; and it is grievous to see how many there are who are hearers of the word—yes, and talkers also—but not doers."

"I remember," said Mrs. Basil, "when I was quite young, having a great desire to learn the way of salvation. I was alarmed ; I dreaded death, and I knew nothing of the way of life. At length a kind friend pointed out to me the finished work of salvation by Jesus Christ alone, and I felt satisfied. But instead of attending to myself and the thousand evils that lurked within, I must needs be troubled about others. I watched with unwearied diligence the words and actions of professing Christians.

Alas ! I met with nothing but disappointments, and the worldling appeared far more consistent in his conduct and pursuits than those to whom I looked for spiritual guidance. I mentioned my difficulties to my friend, and truly his reply was worth remembering. ‘What have you to do with others ?’ he said ; ‘look at home, and you will find quite sufficient employment in watching over the weeds that from time to time spring up within, to prevent your attending to your neighbours. Guard against falling into their errors, and since you are so quick in observing their inconsistencies, pray earnestly to be upheld that you may keep a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards man, and not bring discredit upon your holy calling.’ But I do not wish to speak of myself,” added the lady, “except when I think my experience may be of use to others. Before we part, I want to ask you, Mr. C——, the meaning of the expression that ‘*great grace*’ was upon all the converts.”

“I understand it,” replied Mr. C——, “as intimating, that in conformity with his gracious promise, the Lord Jesus Christ, as Head of his church, poured down upon all those whom he had given to believe in his name and obey his call, such a measure of his Spirit as qualified them for performing those services the peculiar state of the church required. The gift of tongues, the power of working miracles, the disinterested love, the ardent zeal, the abundant charity that all possessed, showed that they were full of the Holy Ghost, and compelled the people to acknowledge their superiority over those whom they had hitherto regarded as their teachers and spiritual guides.

“And here,” said Mr. C——, as he closed his book, “we must pause for to-day. May a blessing from above rest upon what you have heard, and may you give all diligence to be doers of the word as well as hearers, that your conduct may be consistent with your sacred profession, and that great grace may be upon you all !”

No. 41. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,

AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

Death of Ananias and Sapphira.



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THE NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

"A DEEPLY interesting subject is our appointed portion for to-day," said the Village Pastor as he opened his Bible, and addressed his attentive friends and parishioners; "the righteous judgment of God upon Ananias and his wife has been recorded for the instruction and warning of the Church, and may we who are now assembled to read and hear it, pray that the Lord the Spirit will so bless the recital to each of our souls, that we may examine into the sincerity of our profession, and beware of acting hypocritically towards the heart-searching God."

"It is indeed an awful history," said Hyford, "and one which made me pause and consider, even in my thoughtless days. I used often to read it, and when I found out my children or the stable boys in a lie, I repeated it to them: but it never was of much service, for there was no consistency in my own conduct, and without that, you know, sir, all we can say carries but little weight."

"That is very true, master Hyford," said Mr. Lawrence, "and I wish that this important fact was more considered. The religion of the Pharisees is that of the unconverted man, who, feeling that he has an immortal soul to provide for, and yet a body that he deeply loves, wishes to take care of both, and acts accordingly. But you are ready, Mr. C——; and though Master Hyford and I enjoy a little chat between ourselves," added Mr. Lawrence, smiling, "we will not intrude upon your time and valuable observations."

"Well, then," said Mr. C——, "we will commence our history, as related in the 5th chapter of the Acts. 'But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price,

his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the Apostles' feet.' (Verses 1, 2.) The circumstances here related refer to the events in the latter part of the foregoing chapter. We noticed before, that the effect true conversion produced amongst the believers was the exercise of charity and self-denial : those who were rich provided for the poor, consequently none amongst them 'lacked,' or wanted for the necessities of life. The reputation such conduct gained must have been very great ; and though, on the one hand, persecution from the rulers awaited the followers of the new religion ; on the other, the wish of being regarded as superior amongst the Christians prevailed, and many professed themselves converts to the faith. Amongst these the names of two have been handed down to us, not for example, but as a warning. Ananias with his wife Sapphira, heard the Apostles preach the truth as it is in Jesus, and attached themselves to the company of believers. Emulating the conduct of Barnabas, who, as we have seen, sold his estate in the island of Cyprus for the purpose of adding the proceeds to the general fund, they also determined to do the same. They were people of property, and this became their snare ; for seeing how those were beloved and respected who parted with their substance in order to supply the wants of their poor brethren, they thought to gain the same applause, and accordingly determined upon selling the land that had hitherto belonged to them. But now came the trial ; a strong and bitter contest rose in their hearts between God and Mammon. They wished to be counted liberal, self-denying, devoted to the cause they had embraced,—but how was that to be effected ? Must they who had been rich become voluntarily poor ? Must they who had known every comfort and luxury be dependent upon others for a daily supply of common necessities, and give up all the rest ? Flesh and blood could not agree to this ; the old Adam, the natural heart, rebelled ; and then the Tempter, always ready, suggested a plan apparently so wise, so prudent, and yet so practicable, that the unhappy couple fell into the snare at once. 'Why give away all this money ?' he whispered ; 'why make yourselves beggars ? keep a portion of it in thy box ; who will know it ? and take the rest and give it to the Apostles ; they will praise thee even as they have done others before thee, and by thus acting, thou wilt maintain thy character for liberality, and wilt prove that thou art not inferior to other

believers, whilst, at the same time, thou takest care of thyself and those belonging to thee.' Thus Satan tempted, and thus he beguiled these deluded ones onward to destruction, making them a fearful example of attempting to deceive the Omniscient God.

"Let us again turn to the story. When Ananias, in the pride of self-commendation, brought the money, and laid it before the Apostles, expecting their thanks and blessing, what must have been his dismay and horror to hear the servant of God pronounce these awful words : ' Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land ? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own ? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power ? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart ? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.' (Verses 3, 4.) What a fearful exposure was this of motives and actions ! Peter shows the miserable man the delusion under which he had been placed by Satan, whose business it is to go about seeking the destruction of souls, and who is never idle, but near at hand with us all to tempt us out of the strait path that leadeth to Zion. He knows our weak point, the place in our hearts most vulnerable. The time was when God's will and that of his creatures were the same. Adam, in Paradise, had no desire, no will, but that of his gracious heavenly Father, but now, alas, how different ! sin has defiled the divine image in the soul, and transformed the once obedient child into a confirmed rebel—this is now the state of man by nature. But again, infinite love prevails ; he cannot leave man to himself, the Spirit of grace is ready to snatch the sinners from destruction, and to renew the lost, the divine likeness : the object, therefore, of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to destroy the works of Satan in the soul, and in their place erect a kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy. When our Lord was upon earth," continued Mr. C——, " he continually exhorted those who followed him to be '*doers* of the word, and not *hearers* only.' The religion he came to inculcate was not that of the head, but the heart ; he cared nothing for outward professions of regard, and he warned the people, saying, ' Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name ? and in thy name have cast out devils ? and in thy name done many wonderful works ? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you : depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.' (Matt. vii. 22, 23.) Alas for the

guilty pair whose history we are now considering ! This was their case ; they believed, they discovered that the Jesus preached by the Apostles was the very Messiah they, in common with the rest of the Jews, were expecting. They contrasted the doctrine proclaimed by his followers with the cold miserable teaching of the Scribes, who bound heavy burdens grievous to be borne on the necks of their hearers, but avoided them themselves, and therefore they embraced them ; but when the mental trial commenced, and the honesty of the heart was to be exhibited, then Ananias and Sapphira failed. Covetousness was their besetting sin, and led them on to ruin."

" As it has done thousands," said Mr. Lawrence.

" Yes," replied Mr. C——, " when St. Paul examined himself by the letter of the law, he thought himself safe, one who could present to heaven a conscience void of offence ; but, after a time, when perfectly happy and self-satisfied, imagining how pure he was, and undefiled, he came to the tenth commandment, and was told he must not covet,—then the scales truly fell from his eyes, then he discovered he was a sinner in thought, word, and deed, and that in the sight of his Creator, who requires truth in the inward part, he was virtually dead. Man cannot stand by works ; if he attempts it he is ruined. Ananias thought to appear before his fellow-creatures as a superior being, and by his generosity to gain their approbation. And so he would, had they been like himself : had not the Lord the Spirit come forth to vindicate the inward holiness he required, Ananias would have passed for a saint : but it was instantly revealed to Peter the sinful deception he had practised, and, armed by the authority of the Lord Jehovah, the Apostle, in the presence of many, boldly accused him of lying to the Holy Ghost. Oh, my dear friends, how manifestly we behold God in this history as the all-seeing Jehovah ! The sinner saith, ' How doth God know ? can he judge through the dark cloud ? ' (Job xxii. 13.) Alas ! what a real fool is man in his unconverted state—how devoid of common sense ; he tries to believe only what he wishes to be true, and therefore he forgets, that he who planted the ear must hear, and he who formed the eye must see, and that he knoweth the thoughts of man that they are vanity. Well may the prophet say, ' Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us ? and who knoweth us ? ' " (Isa. xxix. 15.)

"How truly this verse expresses the many conversations that must have arisen between the husband and wife before they had arranged their plan!" said Mrs. Basil: "they took counsel with each other, forgetting there was One who invisibly heard all."

"Yes, madam," replied Mr. C——, "this crime was not committed at the impulse of the moment, it was the fruit of much consideration, the result of mature deliberation; therefore the sin was the greater. They agreed together to tempt, or try the Spirit of the Lord; and therefore, bad as it is to lie to men, this was worse, for they had lied unto God. Before we quit this part of our subject," proceeded the Pastor, "I would notice the manifest truth exhibited in this history of the personality of the Lord the Spirit. Some there are, and those not a few, who endeavour to prove that the Spirit is merely an imaginary being, a figure of speech; but how can any one read the New Testament, and continue under such a mistake? It seems to me most strange, and is a doctrine totally at variance with the miserable state of fallen man, and the honour of our heavenly Father."

"Why then do people adopt it, sir?" said Hyford.

"Because those who follow it," replied Mr. C——, "look to their own virtue and goodness to recommend them to the favour of God: unconscious of guilt by nature, they know not their polluted state; they feel, it is true, that they commit sin, but there again they depend upon their alms and good works, and amiability, to work out a righteousness for them, thus setting aside the merits of our Redeemer's righteousness and all-sufficient atonement, as well as the words of Isaiah, quoted by St. Paul, saying, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the *Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.*' (1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.) Do you not perceive, Mr. Hyford, how agreeable the doctrine that exalts ourselves is to poor proud human nature?"

"I do, indeed, sir," replied the old man: "but yet I cannot understand it."

"Because, my friend," replied Mr. C——, "that same Spirit whose office it is particularly to convince of sin, has graciously led you in the right path, and as he begins, so he alone can carry it on. He opens our understanding to understand the Scriptures; he is as the refreshing dew

upon the heart, and it belongs to him to seal us his until the day of redemption ; he subdues and keeps under the corruptions of our nature, which is never destroyed as long as we are alive, but which, blessed be God, we get rid of at death, never again to be plagued and wearied by it. But I do not think," continued Mr. C——, " the agency of the Holy Spirit is sufficiently dwelt upon in the present day ; people are not urged to pray fervently for his blessing and assistance. Why do thousands read the Bible without profit ? Is it not because they forget to implore the light which can alone unfold its sacred beauties, and render them wise unto salvation ? Why are the labours of ministers and teachers attended with so little success ? Because, instead of being sensible of their own insufficiency, and therefore praying continually to the God of all grace to cultivate the seed sown, they think of their own earnestness, their eloquence, and other things connected with self, to mortify which their heavenly Father will continually disappoint them until he brings them to their senses, and causes them to acknowledge the truth of that word, ' Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.' (Zech. iv. 6.)

" I have wandered far from our chapter," continued Mr. C——, " but the Deity of the Holy Ghost is so manifestly set forth in our history that I wished to dwell longer upon it, that all present might know and understand that the great Jehovah revealed in the Bible is the holy, undivided Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, ' whose glory is equal, and whose Majesty is co-eternal.' The judgment that befell Ananias struck terror, not only into the infant Church, but on all that heard it : for no sooner had Peter declared him a liar unto God, than ' he fell down, and gave up the ghost.' Nor was this all ; two were concerned in the fraud and deception, and sentence having been executed upon one, the other likewise must be tried. Sapphira, the unconscious widow, was absent ; she knew not what had happened. At the end, therefore, of three hours she returned, and Peter, the servant of the Most High God, was prepared to meet her. At once he puts to her the question, the test of the sincerity of her faith ; ' Tell me,' said he, ' whether ye sold the land for so much ? And she said, Yea, for so much.' (Verse 8.) Oh ! how often have I heard people act the same ; tell *partly* the truth, but not the *whole* truth, mentally reserving a portion. What difference is there between such, and Ananias and

Sapphira ? Oh ! my friends, if any of you are conscious of having so acted, beware of the consequences ; remember the all-seeing and heart-searching God ; ‘ Lie not one to the other, seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds,’ (Col. iii. 9 ;) and recollect that though instant judgment has not descended upon you, still the day will come when ‘ what you have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.’ (Luke xii. 3.) But alas for Sapphira ! no sooner had she replied, than she was convicted by her inspired judge, and heard him say— ‘ How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord ? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost : and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.’ (Verses 9—11.) Here we see examples of the custom of the country so contrary to our own ; namely, that of interring the dead as soon as possible after their demise. The climate prevents the bodies being kept unburied for any length of time : indeed, if a person dies in the morning, he is generally buried in the course of that day, unless the death occurs in the evening, when the interment takes place on the following day. The supernatural power evidently bestowed upon the Apostles filled the multitude both with reverence and dread. Such events had never before occurred, and at length the people were compelled to confess the Lord had indeed visited his creatures, and taken compassion upon their miseries, for sickness fled, diseases vanished, devils hastened to depart, and the very shadow of Peter was attended with the power of healing ; so that no wonder ‘ believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.’” (Verse 14.)

“ And where were the enemies all this time, sir ?” said Hyford ; “ methinks they were unusually quiet : but perhaps they, too, were convinced at last.”

“ Not so fast, my friend,” said Mr. C——, smiling ; “ if we turn to the 17th verse we shall soon see they were neither quiet nor convinced. Let us read it— ‘ Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the Apostles, and put them in the common prison.’”

"Well, sir," said Hyford, "as usual, I have been at the old fault; hasty in thought, word, and deed. I have been always too ready to jump at conclusions; for far from those rulers being either silenced or convinced, I see they were more determined than ever in their hatred to God's word and people."

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "the world and the gospel can no more unite than water and oil; when wonderful events occur, there are times that the most violent opposers will appear either to have changed their opinions, or seem quite apathetic. I speak of religion and politics, for the proceeding is the same in both. But is it so in reality? Does the lion close his eye when he sees the deer draw near his den? does the cat continue to slumber on the hearth when its prey is within its grasp? No. So, neither does Satanic malice ever sleep, or the hatred that exists in the bosoms of his agents, who are only watching time and opportunity to crush the proceedings they detest. Let a recollection of this important truth be always held in your mind; namely, that you have to contend with a vigilant, watchful foe, who is ever on the watch to devour and destroy, and whose modes of proceeding and warfare are as various as there are days and hours in the year. If one artifice fails, he tries another; if he finds you watchful over your words and actions, he tries the thoughts. There, alas! he is generally successful; but the Spirit fulfils his promise—'that when the enemy shall come in like a flood, he will lift up the standard against him.' Then, for a time, the believer triumphs; he takes his burden to the foot of the cross, and while he laments his weakness which gave admittance to the enemy, he blesses the assistance he has received to drive him out, and implores grace to help him in carrying on a warfare that can only end with life. We can imagine the rage of the high priest, who was a disgrace to the holy office. He was a follower of Sadoc, and denied a future resurrection; the doctrine the Apostles preached, so directly opposed to this miserable faith, provoked him beyond measure. Jesus and the resurrection was their glorious theme; and as the empty tomb bore testimony to the truthfulness of their words, the multitudes of daily converts, too, made matters infinitely worse; and, therefore, without considering the justice of the case, they laid their hands on the Apostles, and thrust them into the common prison. But were they to remain there? Were they to be

silenced and intimidated? No; their mission was far from being completed; much work was appointed them, and onwards they must go. The children and servants of God may truly be said to be immortal as long as he has anything for them to do: bars and bolts, seas and mountains, present no impediment; they are delivered from the one, they are protected and guided amidst the other; and notwithstanding all the assaults of earth and hell, they are enabled to pursue their way, and persevere steadfast unto the end."

"I often think," said Mr. Basil, "that it is a mistake to say miracles have ceased; the conversion of every sinner is a miracle; the preservation of God's people amidst the opposition of the world and the assaults of their enemies is a miracle; the continuation of spiritual life in our hearts amid so much corruption is a miracle; while the fate of people and nations, testifying the truth of prophecy, is also a miracle."

"True," replied Mr. C——, "on every side God testifies his love, his power, and his truth; and if for a time his foes appear to triumph, at the very moment they are exulting in their success, he is preparing for them a signal defeat. This was manifested in the history before us: the vile rulers were rejoicing to think how effectually they silenced the Apostles and alarmed their followers; depriving them of their new teachers would, they expected, soon be the means of bringing them back to their allegiance; and they, no doubt, rested that night particularly well in the thoughts of their victory. But mark what followed:—'The angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught.' (Verses 19—21.) When can man be hid from God? How can the worms of the earth dare to contend with their Maker? He has but to speak the word, and the savage lions become the harmless companions of Daniel in their den; the flames have no power to burn; the fish delivers up Jonah; the angel opens the prison doors, and his people are again sent forth to proclaim salvation to a ruined world. 'Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.' This was their mission; for this they had been chosen by their Divine Master. And the same command is delivered to his people now. Yes, dear friends,"

added the Pastor, with a bright and animated look, "this is my glorious task, to stand forth publicly to declare to you all the words of this life—eternal life. The gospel of Jesus Christ contains the words of life and death. I have been taught to know their value and importance. I must declare them unto you. I must keep nothing back. As a faithful minister of the truth, I must give to saints and sinners their portion—encouraging, guiding, and comforting the one ; warning, entreating, and threatening the other. And oh ! 'who is sufficient for these things ?' But let us proceed. After a night of peace and satisfaction, the great people arose, and at length the council having assembled, they sent to the prison to have the offenders brought before them, that with all becoming dignity they might uphold their authority and power. Little did they reckon upon the disgrace that awaited them, and that while they were making arrangements for a solemn court and trial, the words of David were being fulfilled—'He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh : the Lord shall have them in derision.' (Psalm ii. 4.) Yes ; with hasty steps their messengers returned, saying—'The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors : but when we had opened, we found no man within.' (Acts v. 23.) Could any news possibly be more vexatious than this ? Bars and bolts, keepers and chains, were of no avail ; they fought not only with mortal men, but with ministering spirits, with the God of heaven himself. Well might they be perplexed and confounded ; but like Pharaoh of old, they still determined to carry on the unequal contest. While they were holding commune together, word was brought that the men who had been delivered from their power by so evident a miracle, instead of fleeing away and providing for their safety, were braving all their resentment, and standing in the temple, teaching the people. Again, therefore, they commanded them into their presence ; though through policy they treated them with gentleness, lest the people, who delighted to hear them, might attempt their rescue, and vent their rage upon their persecutors."

"I admire this history," said Mr. Lawrence. "God beautifully maintains the dignity and character of Peter and John as his ambassadors. He arms them with so deep a sense of the importance of their mission, that they are quite unmindful of consequences : they know nothing

of the fear of man, that low servile feeling which never appertains to the real servants of the Lord Jehovah. Delivered from prison, their path of duty lay before them; they had only to step from there to the temple, where they were to preach pardon and peace. This is the Redeemer's aim, the end of his glorious mission; for the salvation of man he became a babe in Bethlehem, and hung as a criminal upon the cross; and to accomplish the same, and complete the number of his kingdom of grace, he continually works, rendering the wrath, the policy, the actions of opposers, all subservient to his own cause."

"How true that is," replied Mr. C——, "and how little the adversaries are aware of it. All the late marvellous events that have taken place verify your assertion, and it may be, we shall live to see it; for I am perfectly sure that all the convulsions that have taken place in nations; all the encroachments made by Popery; all the superstition that is trying to gain an ascendancy amongst ourselves will be so checked, so defeated, so pulled down, as to increase the extent of the Saviour's kingdom, and largely to contribute to his glory and renown, for he 'must put all enemies under his feet,' and go forth conquering and to conquer, until, in the true acception of the word, he is 'King of kings, and Lord of lords.' There are some important lessons to be gained in this chapter for ourselves," proceeded Mr. C——. "Let the judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira sink deep into your hearts. God is a just God, and will not be trifled with. He is an omnipotent God, and cannot be deceived. Beware of covetousness; it is one of those many roads that lead to everlasting sorrow; and however you may succeed in deceiving man, it is impossible to act in the same manner with the heart-searching God. Again, observe that the whole offence of those guilty ones was committed against God the Holy Ghost, the Spirit that proceedeth from the Father and the Son, the Lord and Giver of life. After reading of this fearful judgment, who will venture to deny that the Holy Ghost is God? Alas! that there should be many who do so, and thus deprive themselves of his gracious help and assistance, without which they cannot think a holy thought, breathe a holy desire, perform a holy action."

No. 42. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,
AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

Indignation of the Rulers.



LONDON:
HOULSTON AND STONEMAN,
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1851.

THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

"You broke off rather shortly last week, sir," said Hyford to his excellent teacher, as he watched him when he opened his book to resume his interesting instructions.

"I did so," replied Mr. C——. "I do not wish to be considered tedious, and I felt I had given you all sufficient whereon to meditate. The fearful judgment that befell Ananias and his wife was calculated to impress the minds of the Christians with a deep sense of the holiness and justice of God; to give more exalted views of his being and attributes; to enforce the inward righteousness he requires, and to show how impossible it is to deceive him who is the heart-searching God, and who requires truth in the inward parts. These people were professing Christians, and, as such, members of that Church which our Lord had declared was called out and separated from an ungodly world. But in this lamentable visitation an important lesson was to be learnt, namely, 'that all are not Israel which are of Israel;' that is, that all are not really God's people—the spiritual Israel—who are so in name and profession. Throughout the Bible we read of fearful visitations upon mere professors—persons who in the camp of Israel outwardly obeyed the word of God, but in works denied him. For instance, Nadab and Abihu were punished with instant death, because they forgot their holy character as priests, and offered strange, or unhallowed fire before the Lord, that future professors might learn to look into their hearts, and see the nature of that fire whereby their religious feelings are kindled; in other words, to discover whether their religion proceeds from the purifying influences of God the Holy Spirit, or is merely a passing feeling which can withstand neither temptation nor trial. Again, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were swallowed up for murmuring against Moses and

Aaron ; Miriam, the sister of Moses, was struck with leprosy, because she wished to exalt herself against her highly favoured brother ; Achan, the son of Carmi, who committed a trespass in the accursed thing, (Josh. vii. 1,) that is, who coveted some of the spoils of Jericho which were cursed by God, and which he commanded none of the Israelites to appropriate to themselves, was doomed to be stoned to death as a warning to future generations that God is holy, that he requires truth, honesty, uprightness, not outwardly only, but in the heart, and that unless we offer him more than mere lip service, he will leave us to ourselves, and then we shall fall even as those we are considering.

"I might multiply examples," continued the pastor, "but these will suffice to prove to you, 'that God is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed,' (1 Sam. ii. 3.) When we meditate upon the signification of the Church, and the vast and important meaning attached to the word, we shall see at once the justice of the punishment inflicted upon Ananias and Sapphira. By the word Church neither the Bible nor we, mean the building made with hands, wherein we meet to offer up our united prayers and praises to the great Triune Jehovah; but we mean that multitude whom no man can number—'the hundred forty and four thousand,' (see Rev. xiv. 1;) emblem of those 'who are washed, who are justified, who are sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God,' (1 Cor. vi. 11;) the great and glorious family of the Lord Jehovah, whereof one part is already with him, basking in his presence, and reposing after their turmoils and trials, all of which they overcame through the blood of the Lamb, and hence called the Church triumphant, while the other part is still engaged in fighting manfully against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and is regarded as the Church militant or fighting. But bear in mind that it has a great and glorious Head, a Leader and Captain, and that it is through and by him that each soldier in this vast army is enabled to conquer his cruel and powerful foes. Look abroad, my friends," continued Mr. C——, with a bright and animated look, "turn which way you will, and behold the multitude who are marching Zionwards; from every nook and corner of this vast globe individuals are coming—sects, parties, names vanish into vapour, 'all are one in Christ Jesus.' He alone is the Chief, the Head; he leads them on; his

Spirit has enlisted them, and with one heart and one mind they press onwards. Hell assaults on one hand, the world on the other, but not one of them shall fail; they are 'called, and chosen, and faithful;' sealed with the mark of the living God, and enabled to persevere even unto the end. Oh! may we belong to this noble army of which Christ Jesus is the triumphant Leader.

"But there is another meaning attached to the word Church, namely, the body of Christ, whereof he is the living Head, and this simile expresses that intimate union and fellowship that subsists between himself and his people. The principal of a family is called the head, the chief person in a state is known by the same title; but these may change and produce no difference to those around them. Not so the emblem under consideration, which is thus spoken of by St. Paul: 'He is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the Head of the body, the Church.' (Col. i. 17, 18.) Now, we are all aware that the head is the principal part of the body; it is the seat of thought, it influences the actions, it rules and directs the whole frame; the union between the head and the members is so close that if one is deranged so is the other; pain in any part of the body is felt sympathetically in the head, and pleasure experienced by one is responded to by the other. Can any simile, therefore, more beautifully express the union between Christ and his people? They love what he loves—that is, holiness and true righteousness; they hate what he hates—namely, sin and sinful practices; and thus they are agreed together. But there are some who *pretend* to be a part of this mystical body, but, alas! are no more so than were Ananias and his wife; they were Christians in name, and apparently sincere ones, until the hour of trial came; then it was discovered the world was their master, and avarice their idol; they were weighed in the balance of sincerity and found deficient. This is the important lesson taught us by their history; may we lay it to heart, and examine ourselves as to the honesty of our Christian character. If Christ be your head, of necessity you must be one of the members of his mystical body; beware, therefore, that ye have the mind of Christ, that ye permit no allowed sin to reign in your bosoms, but that your daily petition is, that God would 'search you, and know your heart, try you, and know your thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in you, and lead you in the way

everlasting.' (See Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24.) Thus, you will find the promise fulfilled, 'that sin shall not have dominion over you, for that you are not under the law but under grace,' and though as long as you are here below you will have to maintain a wearisome conflict, still you will be enabled to rejoice in the abundant manifestations of your heavenly Father's presence that will be vouchsafed you. I have dwelt some time upon this subject," added Mr. C——, "because I was not able to say all I wished when we read the history of Ananias and Sapphira, but I am sure you will not regret it, and I trust it has been attended with profit to all.

"We will now resume our chapter, commencing at the 29th verse of the 5th chapter of the Acts. The indignation of the rulers at the gentle but positive perseverance of the Apostles Peter and John to teach and preach Jesus Christ knew no bounds. When they found bars and bolts defied them, and the very men they thought safe in prison were in the temple instructing the people, they were almost beside themselves, and had they not feared to bring down upon themselves the wrath of the multitude, the days of the holy men of God would have been of short duration. As it was, they contented themselves with remonstrating—saying, 'Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.' (Verse 28.) But how calm and manly was Peter's reply, 'We ought to obey God rather than men.' There was no disrespect here; they had no alternative—'Go,' said the angel of the Lord, 'stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life,' (verse 20,) therefore they were obliged to do so; for this they had been miraculously endowed with the gifts of the Spirit, with the power of healing diseases, and delivered out of prison, therefore necessity was laid upon them; yea, woe would have been denounced against them if they had not preached the gospel. Well, therefore, might Peter say that they must obey God rather than men. He then proceeded to preach Jesus and the Resurrection; and to declare that he whom they slew and hanged on a tree 'was exalted by God to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.'"

"How wonderful must all this have sounded in the ears of the priesthood," observed Mrs. Basil; "to think that

he whom they had so barbarously reviled and crucified, between thieves, as if they were his only proper companions, should now be termed a 'Prince and a Saviour,' far above themselves or any earthly potentate, to give repentance, and to pardon sin! What must have been their thoughts!—and then the astounding fact of his resurrection deprived them of the power of gainsaying what they heard."

"True," replied Mr. C——, "I think this a beautiful portion of the New Testament. The office of Jesus, simply explained in so few words, and the glorious rank he holds now his work is done, fills the mind of the believer with sweet and precious thoughts. To him the declaration of the Apostle is inexpressibly valuable, but to these wretched men they were as a thing of nought; had they been told that Jesus had come to deliver their country from a foreign dominion, and to exalt it into the splendid kingdom of former days, they would have rejoiced and hailed the Apostles as their best and chosen friends; but repentance—what did they care about that? What sins did they require to be pardoned? Wrapt in their own self-righteousness, they knew not that the 'whole head was sick, and the whole heart faint,' and that themselves, and their nation might be compared to a man who, from the 'sole of the foot even unto the head has no soundness, but is afflicted with wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores.' (See Isa. i. 5, 6.) Had it been otherwise they would have cried out in the language of other penitents, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' but no, instead of compunction touching their hard hearts, they were provoked beyond measure, and took counsel to slay such unwelcome teachers. But again God raised up an instrument for their safety, whereby, for a space at least, they were shielded from further violence. This champion was one of themselves, his name was 'Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people.'"

"And was he a good man, sir?" said Hyford.

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "he bore a high character for judgment and prudence. Ordering the Apostles out of the council-room, he calmly set before his fellow-rulers the impolicy of meddling with them; he had evidently considered well the fact of the resurrection, the miracles that were being daily performed, and the recent delivery of Peter and John out of prison, which no doubt he attributed to the right cause, namely, the interference of God.

himself. Therefore he wisely said, 'Refrain from these men, and let them alone : for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought : but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it : lest haply ye be found to fight against God.' " (Verses 38, 39.)

"This prudent counsel of Gamaliel has had many imitators at various times," remarked Mr. Lawrence, "and a circumstance came under my own knowledge wherein it proved highly valuable. A friend of mine happened to have a man residing near him who tried to annoy him in every way possible, and amongst other things he gave out that he would introduce into the parish a particular sect of religionists, and aid them by every method in his power. It was at first regarded as an idle threat, and we all looked on to see how the adversary would act ; at length manifest preparations began, and my friend came to me full of apprehension and anxiety lest the peace and happiness of his hitherto united parish should be disturbed, for the party who were expected were not men who had the glory of God and the good of their fellow-creatures at heart, but who entered violently into politics, and only wished the subversion of order and good government. But I could not imagine for a moment that the scheme would be permitted to succeed ; therefore, to the anxiety of my friend, my only reply was, 'Keep quiet, leave this matter alone ; if it is for the good of the people that these persons should come amongst us, you cannot prevent it ; but if, as I suspect, they are only brought here out of envy and ill-will, the whole plan will come to nothing, and all the designs of the adversary will be defeated.' And so the event proved ; month after month passed, the threats were heard as the rumblings of the distant thunder, but no more, and after a time the man who had occasioned so much uneasiness left the place, and nothing has since been attempted to disturb the comfort of that secluded spot, where I believe there are many who are earnest in their inquiry, what they must do to be saved. But Gamaliel deserves more than a passing notice, for he was far superior to those around him, and we look to you, Mr. C——, to tell us his history."

"This," replied Mr. C——, "was the same Gamaliel whom St. Paul mentioned as his master or teacher in the Jewish law ; it is believed that he was son to the aged Simeon, that took the infant Jesus in his arms in the Temple, and declared him to be 'the light of the Gentiles

and the glory of Israel.' Gamaliel was a man of eminent piety and learning, and one of the seven persons who were known by the name of 'Rabban,' a title of particular importance, and which raised those who bore it above all the rest of the doctors, being expressive of the high reputation wherein they were held by the people. As I said before, only seven bore this title, whereof Simeon and two of his grandchildren were three of the number. Gamaliel is supposed to have lived about twenty-two years after the period we are reading of, and to have died eighteen years before the destruction of the city and temple. In order to show his veneration for this great and good man, Onkelos, one of his disciples, is said to have used threescore and ten pounds of frankincense in his interment; a vain and useless expenditure, it is true, but when we remember the solemnities attendant upon Jewish sepulture, it loudly proclaims the affection and respect attached to his memory. The politic advice that he gave to his companions met with the attention it merited. 'To him they agreed: and when they had called the Apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus Christ.' (Verses 40—42.) Persecution for the sake of truth soon began: the world and Christ cannot agree, and well may Satan stir up his servants to oppose the increase of true religion. But he shall never prevail; the redemption of souls is too precious in the sight of their Almighty Father, and though the tempter was allowed to succeed in Paradise, it was to manifest the love of the Most High, and exhibit such wonderful proofs of mercy and goodness, as would redound to his glory throughout the countless ages of eternity. And when the 'mystery of godliness' appeared, even 'God manifest in the flesh,' the throne of the Prince of Darkness shook to its centre; defeated continually by the doctrine and miracles of Jesus, he was filled with rage, such as lost spirits alone can feel; he stirred up the hateful passions of those proud, self-righteous men, whose hearts, uninfluenced by even a wish to do right, were fitting receptacles of his delusive wiles, and by urging them on to persecution, he fondly hoped to check, if he could not altogether crush, *the progress of the truth.*"

"Strange that the resurrection had not taught Satan wisdom," observed Mrs. Basil.

"Satan," replied Mr. C——, "has met with one uniform course of disappointment from that time to the present: he has stirred up adversaries, but they have been defeated; he has raised persecutions, but they have increased his shame; the blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the Church, and the more hell has raged, the wider has spread the dominion of Jesus. Yea, and it shall spread further still; 'the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God,' and the day is fast approaching when 'all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.' The Apostles cared nothing for the stripes they received; they accounted it an honour to suffer shame for his name; he had submitted to more for them, 'he had not hid his face from shame and spitting;' he had 'given his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them who plucked off his hair,' and they felt now the truth of what he had himself told them: 'The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord; if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.' Neither did they mind threats any more than stripes; theirs was the cause of God, and man had no power to retard it; 'daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.' Observe this; Christ alone was their theme; they preached none other. Had they talked about themselves, and endeavoured to gain the favour of the priests, or had they preached about the law, or the ceremonies, or the services of the temple, they would not have been interfered with; but no, their doctrine was too pure, too holy, too humbling; they preached that man is a sinner, lost and ruined; that he cannot restore himself to the favour of his offended God and Father; that all the ceremonies and 'sacrifices ordained by the law could never make the comers thereunto perfect;' for that though the blood of bulls and goats had been commanded to be shed, it was only to shadow forth the one great and glorious sacrifice of Jesus, and that as he had come, had fulfilled all righteousness, had shed his blood on Calvary, and thus finished the work appointed for him to do, the mighty work of salvation was completed, and 'all who believed were justified from all things whereby they could not be justified by the law of Moses.' This was the doctrine the Apostles taught; and it is the duty and privilege of the

ministers of the gospel to follow their example ; any other is false. Jesus Christ and him crucified—Jesus Christ and him glorified—must be our theme, and no other ; and whether we mount the pulpit, whether we open the Bible in the humble cottage, or whether we visit the family dwelling, we must remember that ‘ he is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever,’ and that he alone is the ‘ foundation and corner-stone of his Church,’ the ‘ pillar and ground of the truth.’

“ I am urgent on this point, my dear friends,” continued Mr. C—— ; “ the spirit of the times requires it. There are those who would endeavour to induce you to leave the word of God for the word of man ; who would again impose upon you ceremonies and services wearisome and unprofitable, but which they will tell you are necessary to your salvation, and cannot be dispensed with. Search the Scriptures, you will find no such doctrine there. But you will find it written that Jesus said of the Pharisees, ‘ In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.’ (Matt. xv. 9.) You will find this command : ‘ As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him : rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.’ (Col. ii. 6—9.)

“ We have here finished our observations on our chapter,” continued Mr. C——.

“ True, sir,” said Hyford, interrupting with his usual abruptness ; “ but please to look at your timepiece, and you will see that you owe us a little more ; and,” added the old man with a smile, “ we must not be defrauded of any of the portion you afford us ; this hour is ours, dear sir.”

“ Well, then,” said Mr. C——, with a kindly smile, “ most willingly will I give you all my time ; and as you wish me yet to continue, I will call your attention to a dissension that early arose in the Church of Christ ; I allude to the dissatisfaction felt by certain persons respecting the distribution of the daily alms. If you read the first verse of the next chapter, you will find that the number of the disciples had considerably increased ; and *as they were all provided for out of the common fund, the*

Grecians—that is, believers from different parts of the country of Greece—‘murmured against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.’ It became a matter of much importance, for it was necessary for the maintenance of order and the increase of true holiness that there should be no disagreements. The Apostles therefore, hearing of the dispute, at once collected the multitude of disciples together and told them they had not time to attend to such matters, but that they should look out from among themselves seven men, such as they knew and could depend upon, who might undertake the management of the business, and who would conduct it to the satisfaction of all.”

“But,” observed Mrs. Basil, “these men had more to do, surely, than attending to the wants of a few poor women; besides, they were to be ‘full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom,’ which would hardly have been required for the office spoken of.”

“You are right,” replied Mr. C——, “in a certain sense; the text and context show that more was demanded of them. But even for the management of the distribution of the funds of the Church, it was quite necessary they should be persons of a blameless character, free from covetousness, judicious, able to please all parties, acting with impartiality. Much wisdom, much assistance from above was requisite for this; for truly the natural man is prone to act according to the dictates of his own temper and passions.”

“That is very true, sir,” said Hyford; “as guardian I see much of this; our laws are framed so as to be impartially administered, but there are sad abuses, and unless a man has the love and fear of God in his heart, he seldom cares how he fulfils his part towards his fellow-creatures, at least if there is no chance of discovery. Man, in his unregenerate state, is afraid of his fellow-man, but not of the all-seeing God. I speak, dear sir, from experience,—from what I used to do myself.”

“Alas!” replied Mr. C——, “I fear so do many, and we have need to pray for the Lord the Spirit to enter into the hearts of all employed in public offices, that so they may perform the duties belonging to them with honesty and uprightness. But certainly the business of those seven men was to attend to more than the tables of the widows: they were to teach, to administer to the spiritual wants of the people they were to be over, and thus

strengthen and assist the Apostles in their arduous work. Those who were appointed were called 'deacons,' and we can imagine that while they were seeing to the wants of the poor, they would embrace every opportunity of instructing them, an office they could not fulfil without the Spirit from above. The first on the list was 'Stephen,' into whose history and martyrdom I hope to enter when next we meet ; and 'Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch'—these were the seven ; the multitude of the disciples brought them to the Apostles, declared them the subjects of their choice, and requested them to confirm the election. This they readily did ; they knew them well, as their brethren in the Lord, and when they came before them they prayed both with and for them, that they might be fully qualified for the office they were called upon to fill, and become a blessing to the Church. By thus acting, the government of spiritual matters was put into good order, and the word of God increased ; all worked together, the Apostles and deacons had but the one object in view, namely, the glory of God and the conversion of souls, and hence the word grew and multiplied. The priests, too, no longer, as an entire body, resisted the preaching of the gospel, but a great number of them cast away their traditions, their pride, and self-righteousness, and 'became obedient to the faith' that once they destroyed, and learned to look on him whom they had pierced. Oh, may the time soon arrive when as a nation all will be converted to Jesus, and that we shall behold the fulfilment of those promises that declare, both in regard to Jews and Gentiles, the Lord shall be 'King over all the earth : in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one.'" (Zech. xiv. 9.)

No. 43. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,
AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

Stephen.



LONDON:
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65 PATERNOSTER ROW.

1851.

THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

“WE have a long and interesting chapter before us to-day, my friends,” said Mr. C——, with a bright smile, “the accusation of Stephen, his defence, and martyrdom ;—the first in that noble army of martyrs who, having sealed the truth with their blood, are represented as waiting beneath the altar for the time to come when their death should be avenged. They are thus described in the 6th chapter of Revelation, and saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them ; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.’ Stephen led the van in this noble army, and it belongs to us this afternoon to consider the circumstances whereby he obtained the martyr’s crown. If you recollect,” continued Mr. C——, “he was one of the seven deacons chosen by the multitude of the disciples, and approved of by the apostles, for fulfilling the office of attending to the daily supply of the widows, and assisting them in the instruction of the people. Stephen appears to have been peculiarly gifted, and, ‘full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among them,’ (Acts vi. 8 ;) and those that were opposed to him, ‘were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.’” (Verse 10.)

“How could they, sir?” said Hyford : “were *they* not poor sinful men, and *he* taught of the Spirit of God ? Surely if he is the Master, man’s learning in comparison just amounts to nothing.”

"Very true," said Mr. Lawrence, "you have put us all in our right places, Master Hyford, but many of our clever men would not like your doctrine."

"Perhaps not," rejoined the old man, "but it is true, nevertheless. Do not think because I am myself ignorant, that I despise learning. No, sir, I prize it, I value it, and I look upon it as an infinite treasure. How could we have been able to have had the Bible in our own tongue, if learned men had not translated it, as they call it, out of the foreign languages, wherein it was written? and how could we gain the daily information we do if it were not from the same cause? But what I find fault with is, that learning is too often perverted; that instead of being employed for God's glory, it is often used as a weapon against him; that wicked clever men make use of their learning to try to draw the ignorant, the poor, the unstable into wretchedness here and misery hereafter. Perhaps, sir," added the old man, turning to Mr. C——, "you do not know that in Wade's cottage, at the furthest end of the parish, vile infidel books are being taken in,—books that pretend to hold arguments for and against the truth of the Bible, and in which the infidel strives to prove he has the best of it, and that he can show the Bible to be no more than a tale-book, and the religion of our blessed Saviour only a cunningly devised fable."

"I was not aware of this, indeed," said Mr. C——, with deep sorrow depicted on his countenance; "truly this is a perversion of learning, and the authors of these publications have much to answer for. The multitude of books now written and sent forth into the world, demand the utmost watchfulness on the part of Christ's servants, to see that good and not evil is spread amongst those within their sphere. Prove the Bible false, were that possible, and man would be more miserable than the beasts of the field. Consider for an instant the state wherein he would be plunged; he would be without hope for the future, exposed every moment to accidents and death, and full of wretchedness, anxiety, and woe; in fact while here on earth, his very soul would be already as if in hell, and then when his last hour arrived, what would become of all his proud vain boastings? The very idea he MIGHT be mistaken would increase his sufferings,—the very certainty that he has found out he is mistaken amounts to agony; compared with which the most distressing bodily sufferings are as nothing. Yes, 'men may live fools, but as such they

cannot die.' 'The FOOL hath said in his heart, There is no God.' (Psalm xiv. 1.) He has said it, and tries to believe it true; but in that day which is fast approaching, it will be proved there is a God indeed, a just God and a terrible one, who 'out of Christ is a consuming fire,' and who will ere long trample infidels, atheists, hypocrites, and unbelievers in one fearful miserable crowd under his feet. Never did a professor of this horrible creed die in peace; the terrors of conscience, the dread of the future, the fear of having been mistaken, all forbid it, and the last agonizing wish of the miserable creatures is, 'Oh, that I had never been born!' So said Voltaire, and so say all his followers, and so will say the author of that miserable pamphlet which is now come amongst us, in order to beat up recruits for hell and everlasting woe.

"Let us now turn from this wretched theme to Stephen, radiant in the consciousness of the truth he set forth, and the glorious future he anticipated for himself and his believing brethren. He spake with wisdom, because his God was with him: 'he had given him a mouth and wisdom which all his adversaries were not able to gainsay or resist.' He was endued with the Spirit from on high, and therefore as you truly said, Mr. Hyford, he had more real learning than all the doctors and clever men who thought to confound him; for never could man by mere human knowledge and wisdom know anything of God. This has been abundantly proved by the realities of the past. The heathen philosophers were many of them deeply read and abounded in human knowledge; they tried in vain to penetrate the future, but they could not; they believed, they felt there was a life after this—but where? of what description? they could not tell, and they were obliged to frame an eternity of happiness and misery according to their own limited ideas. Oh, what would some of them have given for the revealed will of God, as written in the Bible! They would have prized it and said, This is just what we want; here is a future state set before us suitable to the soul of man; a state of holiness and purity on the one hand, and a state of endless wretchedness on the other. This, my dear friends, is what we possess, and of which the devil would deprive you if he could; for are not these authors his peculiar servants? are not these books his snares and traps? and are not the doubts and uneasiness wherewith their minds are attacked when they think at all, the wages he bestows on them? Upon turning to

our chapter," continued Mr. C——, "we find a whole troop of men, who hated the Gospel, rise up to dispute the truth of the doctrines that Stephen taught."

"Who were the 'Libertines,' Mr. C——?" said Mrs. Basil.

"They were free-born Jews," replied Mr. C——, "that is, sons of those Jews who had obtained the Roman freedom. St. Paul himself was one of them, for when the chief captain Lysias told him that with a great sum he obtained his freedom, the Apostle replied, 'But I was free born.' (Acts xxii. 28.) When a slave or servant was made free he was called *libertus*, but if he had a son born when he was free, he was called *libertinus*. These Libertines were at one time very numerous at Rome, but being banished thence by the Emperor Tiberius, many went to Jerusalem, where they built a synagogue, and had Rabbis to teach them. The 'Cyrenians' came from the city of Cyrene in Libya, on the coast of Africa, and had also a synagogue at Jerusalem. It is said that many of them were amongst the first converts to the Christian faith. If you recollect, it was Simon the Cyrenian who helped our blessed Lord to bear the weight of his ponderous cross, and his sons Alexander and Rufus (Mark xv. 21) are supposed to be the friends of St. Paul mentioned in Acts xix. 33, and Romans xvi. 13. The 'Alexandrian' Jews were very numerous, while those also of 'Cilicia and Asia' united, that they might, if possible, check the formidable enemy they conceived they had discovered in Stephen. But, as we before observed, he was embued with power from above, and therefore 'they could not gainsay or resist the wisdom and power by which he spake.' Consequently they had recourse to falsehood and perjury, bribing a set of men to swear falsely that they had heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God, saying, 'That Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.' (Verses 11—14.) This was their accusation; well would it have been for them if they had patiently heard what he had to say and profited by it; then they would have discovered he spake the truth, and that instead of blaspheming against their favourite Moses he was only confirming his words, for he had said, 'O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end! Is not this laid up in store with me, and sealed up among my treasures? To me be-

longest vengeance, and recompence ; their foot shall slide in due time : for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.' (Deut. xxxii. 29, 34, 35.) Truly they had been warned ; Jesus had foretold in words not to be misunderstood, that their city was doomed to destruction ; he showed them by his own fulfilment of the law that that dispensation was no more, and confirmed it when he uttered, 'It is finished,' accompanied by the awful rending of the veil that concealed the sanctuary ; thus typifying that from henceforth heaven is open to all believers, to all who in every nation call upon him, and take him as their Saviour and their God. Yes, this was the doctrine Stephen preached ; he proved that he was the promised Saviour, the Messiah foretold by Moses and the prophets ; and we may also suppose that he and all his companions continually warned their hearers to prepare for that fearful destruction which was hanging over their religion, their city, and nation. The council looked upon him ; they expected when he should hear the accusations set forth against him, he would be dismayed and tremble ; but no, on the contrary, calm and dignified as his Lord and Master, 'as they beheld him, they saw his face as it had been the face of an angel ;' a beautiful proof of the divine approval of this undaunted servant of God. 'Then said the high priest, Are these things so ?' (Acts vii. 1.) Stephen at once replied in a respectful manner ; he addressed the council, and in one of the most conclusive discourses upon record, he traced out the history of the Jewish Church from its very commencement, carried it through the wilderness, established it in the temple, and by a glorious flight declared that the time was come when neither in one particular place nor another would God be worshipped, but that 'as heaven was his throne, and earth his footstool,' he would establish his Church universal, and all nations should behold the salvation of our God. It is so delightful to trace the little flock, the Church of Christ, step by step, that I must indulge my fancy here," continued Mr. C——. "It has outlived innumerable trials, it has survived all shocks, and has proved indeed that it is founded upon the rock Christ, and that the gates of hell shall never prevail against it. Christ is the head, the Church is his body, and as such it will live and increase until he presents it to himself, 'a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.' (Eph. v. 27.) Remember, my hearers,

the meaning of the word Church ; that body of believers in every nation that feareth the Lord and is accepted by him, those who are regenerated by the Lord the Spirit, who are washed in the blood of the Saviour, adorned with the robes of his righteousness,—who have a deep sense of Christ crucified in their heart, while they are continually refreshed with a view of him as their glorified Lord, and anticipating the time when, by virtue of their union with him, they shall enter into everlasting joy. This is the Church ; not this sect or that, not this party or that, but simply those whom I have endeavoured to describe, the ‘hundred forty and four thousand’ redeemed from among men, and who are ‘called, and chosen, and faithful.’

“Let us now trace this Church even as Stephen did ; and while, on the one hand, we have an outline of Israel’s ingratitude, on the other, we see the stream of love flowing in one uninterrupted channel from the beginning, and extending even to the end of time. ‘The God of glory appeared to Abraham while he dwelt with his father in Mesopotamia.’ He belonged to the family of Shem, that highly favoured son of Noah, who left the ark, the shelter and harbour of refuge, with the blessing of the Lord Jehovah. ‘Blessed be the Lord God of Shem.’ The Lord was his portion, truly then he could lack nothing ; and in him were all the nations of the earth to be blessed, because of his seed according to the flesh, Christ came, ‘who is over all, God blessed for evermore.’ (Rom. ix. 5.) To the furtherance of this, the most important event that ever happened on this lower earth, God determined to single out one particular family, to whom alone he would confide his great and wonderful intention. ‘Man shall find mercy,’ was the declaration of Jehovah, and in order to accomplish it, he separated Abraham from his idolatrous friends, and bade him go far away into a distant land. And had he possessions there? had he broad lands and fields to compensate him for the loss he sustained in quitting his patrimonial inheritance? No, he had not : every step he took trespassed upon others, and it was not until he bought the field of Machpelah as a burying-place for his beloved Sarah, that he could say he owned an acre in the land of Canaan. But what were the promises upon which he rested? Even that the land wherein he now sojourned should be his ; and though at the time this word was passed Abraham was childless, yet he believed God, ‘being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was

able also to perform.' (Rom. iv. 21.) You all know how truly this word was kept, and that in Isaac the promised seed he already beheld its fulfilment; but when this favoured boy, this child whose birth had been foretold by angels, was ordered to be sacrificed, then we behold the triumph of faith, and learn this precious lesson, that to us also shall be imputed the like saving faith, 'if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.' (Rom. iv. 24, 25.)

"After slightly treating of Abraham as the father of his nation, the eloquent pleader hastened on to speak of Jacob and his family. He mentioned how, through famine, they were compelled to go into Egypt for food, where, unknown to them all, the envied and ill-treated Joseph was ruling as lord of the land. He showed them the wickedness of their forefathers, and how tedious was the completion of the word of promise. The sojourn in Egypt caused them to behold the wonders of covenant love, and prove the faithfulness of God. Then he brings his hearers on to Moses, him of whom he was accused of speaking blasphemously. He tells them he was born when the persecution against their fathers was at its height, that he was 'exceeding fair,' or as it is in the original, 'fair to God;' that is, sanctified from his birth, set apart for his service, and thus fitted for the wonderful position he was hereafter to fill. As an infant he was beautiful, whereby he touched the heart of the king's daughter, who had him instructed in all the learning of the Egyptians, and becoming a statesman, he learned the art of governing, and was mighty in words and in deeds. If you recollect," continued Mr. C——, addressing himself more particularly to the farmers, "I told you once that the life of Moses might be divided into three forties."

"I do, sir, for one," said Hyford; "I like to hear this Old Testament history in this place, it causes them so beautifully to agree with each other, and methinks I see Stephen's motive for thus going through the account of his forefathers. He has brought them step by step to Moses; now he prophesies of Jesus, and I suspect in a very little more he will be down upon them."

"We shall see," said Mr. C——, with a smile. "Stephen proceeds with his history, saying, 'And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame

of fire in a bush.' (Acts vii. 30.) Moses wondered, as well he might; the bush burned with fire, yet was not consumed; a fitting type of Israel in the fire of afflictions and trials, and yet increasing more and more, for it is written, 'The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew.' (Exod. i. 12.) But this he could not comprehend then; he was not aware of the meaning of the vision; but when he heard a voice proclaiming, 'I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; then Moses trembled, and durst not behold.' (Acts vii. 32.) After declaring this covenant name of the Lord Jehovah, Stephen proceeded next to contemplate it in all its various bearings; he spoke of him as the angel, that is, the messenger, for that is the signification of the word; and whom did he mean? Was it not Jesus the messenger of the covenant, he of whom Moses said, 'A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear?' (Verse 37.) Yes; he watched over the 'Church in the wilderness,' guiding and directing its movements himself; he led them by a 'pillar of a cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night;' 'he fed them with manna;' he caused the water to flow out of the stony rock; he never left them or forsook them; and, finally, he brought them into that good land which hundreds of years before he had promised to his servant Abraham. There 'Solomon built him an house.' (Verse 47.) But listen to what he said of it: 'Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded.' He knew well the character of the High and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity. He knew that he dwelleth not in temples made with hands, for that heaven is his throne and earth is his footstool, and therefore, what house could be erected meet and fitting for him in this poor sinful world? None; and yet," dear friends, added the Pastor, "though this is true of the most costly temple that was ever fabricated by man, there is a temple wherein this great and glorious Being not only condescends, but delights to dwell, even in the heart of him who is humble and contrite, and that trembles at his word. (See Isa. lvii. 15.) And St. Paul reminds us of this, 'Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.'

(1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.) Remember, then, whose ye are, and whom ye profess to serve: is it nothing that your bodies should be the temples of the Holy Ghost? that ye are sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called to be saints? (1 Cor. i. 2.) Oh, yes; these are your privileges as believers, and of them ye are invited freely to partake. Value them as they deserve, for in comparison the world's glory becomes as dross, and the most splendid fabrics erected by the ingenuity of man sink into oblivion; for these shall perish and decay, while the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

"All the eloquence of Stephen had been directed to preaching Christ to his judges: this was his object from the first; it was to prove him the Prophet foretold by Moses, to show that he was the Great Head of the Church in the wilderness, the hope of the true Israel, the theme of the prophets. But having come to this he could contain himself no longer: he remembered how cruelly many of these servants of God had been treated, and how frequently the saints of old had testified against them, even as Nehemiah did. 'They were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations.' (Neh. ix. 26.) He told them of the perverseness and provoking conduct of their nation, and declared that in like manner they also resisted the mild and gentle warnings, teaching, and guidance of the Spirit from on high. 'Which of the prophets,' said he, 'have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom you have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.' (Acts vii. 52, 53.) Thus far they listened; but when they found him become their accuser, condemn them as the betrayers and murderers of Jesus, convict them of innumerable crimes, they could endure it no longer; their fury became ungovernable, and like wild beasts they gnashed their teeth with rage. He stood undaunted, he heeded not their violence; how could he? a bright and glorious display of the Divine presence was given to him, and the fear of death was hastily destroyed in the prospect of the enjoyment of the glory revealed to his admiring sight. 'Behold,' he cried, 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing on the right

hand of God.' (Verse 56.) He beheld Jesus, him whom his soul loved, watching him, pleading for him, ready to receive him with his gracious approval of 'Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'"

"I like to hear of this," said Hyford; "it gives us a glimpse of heaven and of our blessed Lord. We seem to catch a view of him again."

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "the last time was when in spirit we meditated upon his slowly rising from the earth, and finally concealed by a silver cloud. Now we behold him at the right hand of God, that is, in the highest state of glory and exaltation in the regions above, where, St. Paul tells us, 'He ever liveth to make intercession for us.' (Heb. vii. 25.) And who ever applied to him in vain? Blessed be God, no one; 'Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out,' (John vi. 37,) he said, when here on earth, and millions since have found it to be true. But Stephen's declaration was too much for the fancied piety of these detestable hypocrites, who under a pretended zeal for religion and the Divine honour did not scruple to commit a most cruel and deliberate murder. For pretending they could not endure such blasphemy, 'they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.' (Vers. 57—60.) How beautiful is his prayer for his persecutors!"

"Yes," interrupted Hyford, "just like Jesus, just like his dear Saviour, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' How beautiful to see the Master and servant thus agree! But pardon me, sir, I could not help saying what I felt."

"Never mind," said Mr. C——, good-naturedly; "I like you to express your feelings; I know you are all the better for it, my good friend. Stephen's was a rough death-bed; but he heeded it not: he prayed for his murderers, and we know one who was present, who soon after became a burning and a shining light, and also obtained the martyr's crown. I allude to Saul; he who standing

by kept the clothes of the witnesses, as a proof how warmly he approved of the bloody deed. And to whom did the dying saint address his prayer? Even to the Lord Jesus, him whom he beheld in human form, yet the Almighty God and Everlasting Father. None other can receive the soul, none other can say, 'Come unto me, and I will give thee rest,' but he said it to Stephen; he imparted to him such heaven-born peace, that he fell asleep, not that eternal sleep the infidels try to believe in, but the sleep of death—that sleep from which believers shall ere long be aroused by the trump of the Archangel; when rising from their earthly bed they shall awake to life, light, and glory. But while his body fell asleep, what of his soul?—that he bequeathed to his Saviour and his God. And oh! how joyfully did it enter the realms of bliss, and rejoiced in its emancipation from its kindred dust. If you search through the New Testament," continued Mr. C——, "you will discover that this is the only circumstantial account of the death of a believer that is on record; numbers of references are made to the departure of various persons, but this is the only one related with minuteness."

"And a lovely account it is," observed Mrs. Basil. "The eloquence, the beauty of his defence, the boldness of his accusation, the fearlessness of his demeanour, the fervour of his piety, the gentleness of his spirit, the steadfastness of his faith, united with the circumstances of his death, conspire to render Stephen, in my judgment, one of the most lovely of the New Testament characters."

"I agree with you, Madam," replied Mr. C——. "May we be endued with the same precious faith, and upheld by the same adorable Spirit, then shall we also be enabled to commit the keeping of our souls to Jesus, our divine Redeemer, and say, 'I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.' May his grace and truth be with you all. Amen."

No 44. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,

AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

Simon Magus
AND
Philip the Evangelist.



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THE

NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

"BEFORE you begin your chapter to-day, sir," said old Hyford, "I want to ask a question,—Who was this Saul so particularly mentioned in the first verse? Of course, a great many persons were present when Stephen was being stoned, but Saul alone is spoken of."

"Because," replied Mr. C——, "the Holy Ghost here sets him before us in his natural character—as a persecutor; he was a 'Jew of Tarsus, a city of Cilicia,' brought up by the very Gamaliel who counselled his brethren to refrain from treating the Apostles, Peter and John, with violence (see Acts v. 34—40); he showed himself particularly enraged against the Christians, and 'that he felt he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth,' (ch. xxvi. 9.) Zeal urged him on, and, therefore, when Stephen was hastened out of the city to be put to death, he was the most active; and to show his 'cordial approbation,' which is the better meaning of the word than only 'consenting,' he kept the clothes of the executioners. 'And at that time there was a great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles.' (ch. viii. 1.) The blood of Stephen was the first that flowed, and it increased the cruelty and hatred of the adversaries of the Church a hundred-fold; persecution became sweet, and the Church at Jerusalem began to experience bitter trials. In this act of cruelty and bigotry Saul was peculiarly active; the name of Jesus was distasteful to him, and those who were his followers he hated with a savage hatred. His blind and furious zeal was most acceptable to the priesthood;

they wanted one who would carry out their wish of destroying the newly risen sect. And how often in after ages has his conduct been imitated, under pretence of doing God service ! Look at the tens of thousands that papal Rome has murdered ; the relentless bigotry wherewith she has followed all those who would be emancipated from her thralldom, and how continually she has sanctioned persecution for conscience sake. For, truly, men professing themselves followers of Jesus, and calling themselves Christians, have continually inflicted on their fellow-creatures injuries and cruelties which, at first, were practised by the heathen. But, though I could tell you much on this subject, and show you that what Popery was at first so she is now, unaltered and unalterable, we must rest here, and turn to the persecution spoken of in our chapter, which was raised by the unbelieving Jews, and at this time was confined to Jerusalem. But this trial, fearful as it was, was the means employed by the Great Head of the Church for the furtherance of his cause. Instead of the disciples remaining together in one place as heretofore, now they dispersed, and were scattered abroad throughout Judea and Samaria ; whereby the glad tidings of the gospel again were heard, as well as the doctrine of the resurrection of the Redeemer, a theme they dwelt upon as confirmatory of the truth of his mission. From his own lips many in those parts had heard the glad tidings of the gospel—the gracious invitation to flee from the wrath to come : now those doctrines were repeated, and Judea and Samaria invited to accept them.

“The death of Stephen was greatly felt, for the loss of such a man could not easily be repaired ; and, had the church been formed by natural power, such a dreadful example of determination on the part of the rulers would have speedily crushed it. But not so,—the kingdom of Jesus is not of this world : upheld by his power, strengthened by his Spirit, guided by his providence, it ever will stand firm. No ; not the gates of hell shall prevail against it, and the fury of all its enemies shall only be the means of causing it to keep closer to its Head, and making it more holy, more pure, more lovely.”

“That is very true,” said Mr. Lawrence ; “it was in the midst of persecution the Church of Christ was cradled, and it is in this atmosphere she breathes the purest. It was in after ages, when Constantine the Roman emperor became a convert to the faith, and, consequently, all proceeded

smoothly; that the spirituality and holiness of the Church declined; errors crept in; and, while there was a great outward profession and show of religion, real godliness and the true doctrines of the gospel were lost; and out of these corruptions arose Popery, that deadly perversion of the word of God."

"Yes," replied Mr. C——; "and when it gained the ascendancy it acted like Saul the persecutor, who made havoc of the Church, 'entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison.' (Acts viii. 3.)

"Truly," said Mr. Basil, "we need only turn to the pages of history and see the exactness of the likeness: for thus has Popery acted ever since its rise; it has ever been a persecuting power; one of its tokens is that it is drunk with the blood of the saints. And when we recollect the fact, that from 1478 to 1517, thirteen thousand persons were burnt because they would not become papists, we learn at once that ignorance and bigotry ever produce persecution."

"Would that the same excuse could be made for these unhappy enemies of the truth as there was for Saul!" answered Mr. C——. "He did it ignorantly, in unbelief; he thought that Jesus of Nazareth, the lowly babe who was regarded as the Son of Joseph and Mary, could not be the Messiah so long expected; he could not reconcile the Saviour's poverty and degraded state with his ideas of the grandeur that he, in common with the Jews, attached to the promised Emmanuel; 'therefore,' he said, 'I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.' (Acts xxvi. 9.) But not so with Popery and its followers. They voluntarily shut their eyes to the truth; they possess a Bible, but it is a corrupted version; their prayers are idolatrous; their practices sinful, covetous, superstitious and degrading. I could add much more, but I have only glanced at this great anti-Christian heresy in order to show you that where the Spirit of Jesus is not, there is confusion and every evil passion prevailing; and the acts of the bigoted persecutor, Saul, were only similar to what every blind and ignorant zealot has performed ever since.

"Now, let us follow Philip; he is the second mentioned of the seven deacons; Stephen, you know, was the first, but his history is complete. To Samaria Philip directed his steps—'And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and

seeing the miracles which he did.' (Acts viii. 6.) Yes, their minds were prepared to receive the word ; the great Head of the Church first set the example as to whither they were to direct their steps, for he himself preached first in Jerusalem (see John ii. 13), then in Judea (chap. iii. 22), and then in Samaria. And this same course we find him commanding his disciples to pursue, saying to them, 'Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria ;'—these three first—and then, blessed be his name for adding, 'and unto the uttermost part of the earth.' (Acts i. 8.) To us, therefore, has the word of salvation been sent, and may we treasure and lay it to heart ; for the value of it is more precious than rubies, and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it."

"It is very beautiful," observed Mrs. Basil, "to see the arrangement of mercy in the commands given to the disciples. It was a very short time before our Lord himself had been told 'that the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans ;' and now, behold, just as he was ascending into heaven, he gives Samaria into the care of his people, and by the influence of his Spirit prepares the hearts of its inhabitants with one accord to attend to the preaching of his word."

"The whole plan of salvation, madam," replied Mr. C——, "is mercy and unmerited love. The merits or deservings of man are not thought of : all have sinned, all are equally vile ; there is not one righteous to be found—no, not one ; for the 'whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint ;' therefore, those who look for human merits must be woefully disappointed, for, truly, man has nothing to recommend himself to a pure and holy God ; and if he strives to render himself deserving the Divine favour, he is only making matters worse. No ; it is for sinners Jesus died,—the sick whom he came to heal, the naked to clothe, the wanderer and the outcast to seek and save."

"That is very true, sir," said Hyford ; "surely I was just in the same state as these Samaritans when his mercy found me ; I was in worse than ignorance respecting him—I was in enmity with him : for sincerely I despised, yes, I verily believe, hated all his people ; and I used to try to call them hypocrites, and every name I could think of ; but, somehow, the words died on my tongue, and I would feel ashamed of myself."

But, because Jesus died for sinners, he died for me ; because my very soul was sick unto death, he declared he came to heal it ; he saw me utterly naked, and he covered me with his righteousness,—and all this when I thought nothing about him, and little knew he was so near.”

“ Yes, Mr. Hyford,” replied Mr. C——, “ truly it may be said of you, ‘ He passed by you, and said unto you, Live ! ’—the word was accompanied by the will, hence you are enabled to add your testimony to the truth and faithfulness of our covenant God. Amongst those who attended Philip’s preaching was a man of some considerable importance, owing to the extraordinary influence he possessed over the minds of the people, who regarded him as the great power of God (verse 10), or, in other words, the promised Messiah. But the simple heaven-born truths taught by the sacred preacher convinced them of their error ; and though Simon had used sorcery and various satanic arts, to mislead those who attended to him, with extraordinary success, yet none could stand before the majesty of the Gospel of Jesus. Men and women heard of Jesus, and being taught by the Spirit from above, boldly came out from amidst those who yet continued in ignorance and error, and gladly offered themselves for baptism, that thus they might outwardly enrol themselves amongst the professed followers of their gracious Saviour. Astonished at all he saw and heard, the sorcerer himself became an attendant upon the instructions of Philip, and, after a time, was so convinced of the truth, that he not only declared himself a convert, but offered himself for baptism. A deep and important lesson is taught us in the history of this man,” continued Mr. C—— : “ we find him powerfully attracted by the word of truth ; he believed all he heard ; conscience bore testimony to its faithfulness, and he enrolled his name amongst the believers in Jesus. But, alas ! it was head knowledge ; though he assented to what he was taught, his heart remained unchanged ; he had been baptized with water, but the gracious unction of the Holy Spirit was withheld, and presently we shall see the hypocrite unmasked.

“ The conversion of the Samaritans had occasioned much joy amongst the brethren, and the Apostles at Jerusalem determined to send to them Peter and John, in order to instruct them still further in the faith of Jesus. The newly baptized converts hastened to attend upon

them, and, at the prayer of the Apostles, the Holy Spirit was so imparted to them, that they, in common with those who embraced the faith, were endowed with miraculous powers. And now came the trial for the sorcerer, the empty, hollow professor. Like Balaam of old, he wished to make merchandise of the word of God ; the miraculous powers bestowed upon the converts as the accompaniments of the gift of the Holy Spirit, roused all his covetous desires ; he thought, were he thus similarly endowed, how much he could turn it to his advantage ; the past fame he had enjoyed vanished into air in comparison of the advantages now within his grasp ; and having, like the others, been baptized, he regarded himself as quite entitled to similar gifts. But to make still surer of the matter, and judging of the Apostles by himself, he expected their poverty would induce them to listen to his offer when he said, 'Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.'" (Acts viii. 19.)

"What an exposure is this history of a mere professor!" exclaimed Mr. Lawrence ; "and what a convincing proof that baptism cannot wash away sin, or convert the heart !"

"Yes," replied Mr. C—— ; "millions have been partakers of the rite of baptism, and thus outwardly became members of the Church of Christ, but who, unless the Lord the Spirit has had mercy, and bestowed on them his life-giving power, have continued 'in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity.'"

"Undoubtedly it was to teach the world this mighty truth that this sad history is left upon record," observed Mrs. Basil. "Foreseeing how the sacrament of Baptism would be misunderstood in after ages, the Great Head of the Church recorded this transaction that we might learn to separate the shadow from the substance ; that we might, in other words, fix baptism in its right place, namely, as a token of admission into the Christian Church, and not confound it with those precious gifts and benefits which are bestowed by God the Spirit alone, when, how, and where, none can tell, but which are plainly manifested by their effects."

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.'" (John iii. 8.)

"We will now turn from this miserable man, this

disgrace to the profession of the religion of the holy Jesus, and follow the steps of Philip, whose genuine piety presents a beautiful and happy contrast to the hollow and hypocritical Simon Magus. 'And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.' (Verse 26.) Why was this command given to the disciple? Why was he told by the angel of the Lord to go to that part of the road which he declared at the same time was desert? But did that signify? No. Did Philip refuse to go because he was sent to a desert spot? No; we are told he arose and went,—the servant of God is always willing to obey his Master's order; he does not stay to ask, why go here, or why stay there; no sooner does he receive the command than he prepares himself to obey. This is faith;—and those that trust implicitly to his guidance, ready to follow wheresoever he leads, will find that they travel in the right path, and that he will conduct them to glory and peace.

"The account of Philip being ordered into the desert road, uncertain what to do or what was to follow, reminds me," added Mr. C——, "of a little tale I lately read of a clergyman, who was roused late at night, by some strange-looking men, who requested him to go with them. Their appearance at first made him afraid, but at their earnest solicitation he at length complied, feeling satisfied that he was going on an appointed mission. On they went; they led through dark lanes and narrow alleys, till at last they came to a cellar. At first he refused to go further, he feared he knew not what; the looks of his conductors, and the gloomy vault below, caused him to draw back. But he must proceed, his Master had work for him to do: in that miserable cellar lay one who was on the borders of eternity, and thirsted for the word of life. 'Fear nothing, sir,' said the man, as he lighted the clergyman down the ladder; 'fear nothing;—no harm shall befall you.' Strengthened by the Holy Spirit, who sent him on this wondrous mission, he proceeded. On a miserable bed lay one whose lamp of life was almost extinguished,—cholera had marked him for its victim; but Infinite Mercy had redeemed his soul. With feeble utterance he told the minister of his once having heard him read the 139th Psalm. He could not repeat much, but what he mentioned of the all-seeing eye of God being ever upon him, led his visitor to know what he meant.

“ ‘Let me hear those words once more,’ he cried—‘once more, before I die.’ They were repeated ; then he was so filled with horror at the recollection of his past life, that despair had well nigh overwhelmed him. But, no ; he heard of Jesus, the sinner’s friend ; and it was given to him in that dread hour to believe and receive him as his Saviour and his God. From that pallet-bed in that miserable vault arose the soul of this ransomed one ; and the honoured instrument, so strangely sent, declared to those who surrounded him the everlasting Gospel before he again returned to the open streets, and was safely conducted back to his own dwelling.”

“ Well, sir,” said Hyford, who had listened with breathless attention, “ how wonderful are God’s dealings with poor sinners ! surely he does not desire that any should perish, and those who are lost have to thank themselves.”

“ Yes,” replied Mr. C——, “ the mercy of God towards this miserable creature was beautifully manifested, and is an encouragement to God’s people to employ every opportunity that presents itself for the furtherance of his cause, and also to obey any call that they may receive, though their short-sightedness prevents their discerning wherefore they are sent. Thus this good man acted, and thus Philip of old obeyed, going into the unpropitious desert because his Lord had commanded him ; now we shall see the reason :—‘ And he arose and went ; and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasure, and had gone to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot, read Esaias the prophet.’ (Verses 27, 28.)

“ Here was his mission : this Ethiopian noble had been converted to Judaism ; he had journeyed to Jerusalem on purpose to worship in the temple, and was returning to his mistress and his home. But while he travelled along he employed himself in reading ; in studying the word of God, and endeavouring to understand those prophecies which proclaimed a coming Saviour. But his mind was all confusion ; like the Jews in general, he viewed the sacrifices as ceremonies appointed as atonements for sin ; he knew nothing of their spiritual meaning, and that they were only ‘ shadows of good things to come ;’ he, therefore, longed for the veil of ignorance to be removed, and to understand those truths which he felt convinced were concealed from him, and to discover which he felt deeply

anxious. All these thoughts, these desires, were to be gratified: the Lord the Spirit, who had at the first enlightened his dark heathen mind, in his own good time, was prepared to bestow upon him still further blessings. Philip the Evangelist walked that same road, pondering upon what kind of mission lay before him; he heard the sound of wheels, and saw the approach of a princely equipage. Now his duty lies before him: 'Go near,' said the Spirit, 'and join thyself unto this chariot.' (Verse 29.) Yes, there rode the noble, reading aloud, unmindful of any thing but his book and its interesting subject. Then Philip ran to him, and said, 'Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me?' (Verses 30, 31.) Very true; he felt his ignorance; and the question of the stranger was so appropriate to his frame of mind, that he was satisfied he could give him all the information he required.

"Now, let us see," continued Mr. C——, "what portion it was that so perplexed him. It was this:—'He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb dumb before his shearers, so opened he not his mouth: in his humiliation his judgment was taken away; and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.' You, my dear friends, who possess your Bibles, and love to read in them, are at no loss to interpret the meaning of this beautiful quotation. You know, if you turn to Isaiah liii., 7th and 8th verses, there it is written; and is a lovely and beautiful prophecy of the patience and humiliation of our gracious Redeemer, in that fearful hour when he 'bore our griefs and carried our sorrows;' when he was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities; when the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we were healed. You already know all this. Oh! that its precious truths may sink deep into your hearts, and thus you will be led to know and value Jesus indeed as your Saviour and your God. This was the interpretation given by Philip; he preached unto his eager listener Jesus, as 'the Way, the Truth, and the Life.' He explained to him the nature of his mission; he instructed him in the true meaning of faith, and a corresponding consistency of practice; and as the mind of the nobleman was opened by the Spirit, and enabled to understand doctrine so new, but yet so reasonable, when they arrived at some water, he suddenly

exclaimed, 'See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?'"

"How quickly did this man comprehend the great truths of Christianity," observed Mr. Lawrence: "he soon saw the meaning of the sacred rite of baptism."

"Yes," replied Mr. C——. "When he understood the nature and character of Jesus as his Saviour, he wished to enrol himself amongst his disciples. Philip had taught him the nature of baptism, and surely he was a fit subject for the holy ordinance, the Lord the Spirit having led him, step by step, until he was able to say, with all sincerity, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' How much is contained in these few words! Thus to believe is to receive the Saviour in all his fulness, and to take him for our 'wisdom and righteousness, our sanctification and redemption.' (1 Cor. i. 30.) No sooner was the nobleman baptized than the mission of Philip was completed; his work in that desert road was done;—a soul hungering and thirsting after righteousness had been satisfied—he was admitted into the visible Church of the redeemed. And then the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, so that he saw him no more; but though he must have regretted his loss, the happy, glorious truths wherein he had instructed him during their brief intercourse, filled him with such holy joy, that he went on his way rejoicing."

"I have often wished to know what became of this man, sir," said Mr. Hill; "I have thought of him many times."

"History," replied Mr. C——, "is a great helpmate to the word of God, and in consulting its pages, we can fill up those spaces which were not absolutely necessary for us to know, and, therefore, passed over by the divine Author. This is one of them, and by turning to its records, we learn that this noble convert became a preacher of the Gospel in his own country, Ethiopia, and the adjoining countries; and his exertions were so blessed that many persons became converts to Christianity. It is also added, that the Holy Spirit was bestowed upon him, even as upon other disciples, in order to qualify him for his glorious mission. As for Philip, we read that he was found at Azotus, or Ashdod, a city of the Philistines, and proceeded along the sea-coast, preaching the Word of God to every city in his way, until he came to Cæsarea, where, from that time, he generally resided; in fact, if we turn

to the 21st chapter of the Acts, we shall find him dwelling in his own house, surrounded by his family, of whom this remarkable mention is made, 'that he had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.'

"What a beautiful insight do these few words give of the happiness of Philip and his children. Yes, let parents bring up their beloved ones in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and then they may indeed be able to rejoice over them, with a feeling known only to a parent; then they may hope to see them partakers of such spiritual gifts as will render them blessings to those around them, and will make them fitting instruments for the furtherance of the Gospel, and the promotion of the happiness of others.

"I have now concluded our interesting chapter," added Mr. C——, as he closed his book. "You have had much given you for meditation; and whether you dwell upon the awful hypocrisy of Simon, or the beautiful method taken to inform the truth-seeking Ethiopian, you will find a large field for instruction: the omniscience of Jehovah being equally manifested in both examples, and teaching us that all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

No. 45. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,
AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

The Conversion of Saul.



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THE NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

It was with fresh and deep interest Mr. C——'s friends continued to attend his weekly lecture at the Court. As all had the liberty of bringing others with them, the room was nearly filled, and though the worthy butler rejoiced at the number who came to listen to his revered master's instructions, whom he thought the very best man that had lived since the days of the Apostles at least, he was often sorely perplexed to find seats for so large a company; still one way and another he contrived to manage it, and never looked better pleased than when all were occupied. The consistent conduct of the pastor produced its proportionate respect; it added weight to his instructions; he had found the path of life himself, and he obeyed his Divine Master's commands to warn and invite others to enter it likewise. He felt most deeply the importance of the present moment;—that eternity with rapid wing is hastening onwards, and that there is no time to spare; immortal beings hurrying onwards to their everlasting home, and the question "Whither?" was continually uppermost in his anxious mind. "Work while it is called to-day," was his maxim, and he acted accordingly; his business was to win souls, to feed the flock committed to his care, and to "profess a good profession before many witnesses." The dignity of the sacred office was constantly present to him, and therefore he rejected all invitations to enter into the world and become a partaker of its fashions and gaieties. And when he proved to his friends that he could say *No* to whatever was contrary to the spirit and principle of the gospel, they ceased to trouble him, and only respected him the more; while the courteousness of his manner, and the uniform cheerfulness of his conversation, rendered his society most agreeable.

The sublime character of his studies imparted a corre-

spondent sacredness to his general habits; and when he took his Bible from his pocket, and opened it at the intended place, a smile of pleasure would play upon his features, and prove that all his heart was in his present duty. Thus he looked and felt, when he approached his seat, and fixed upon the ninth chapter of the Acts. The wonderful history of the Conversion of St. Paul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles, as he is generally called, afforded him the opportunity he so much prized of declaring the efficacy of Divine grace, of showing the incapability of man to resist the power of God, and that the proudest self-righteous Pharisee must become like a little child, and say, "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" But now we will take our usual place, and also become attentive listeners to Mr. C——'s instructions, who thus began :—

"'And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.' (Verses 1, 2.) What a description is this of a religious bigot!" said the teacher. "Here is a true picture of corrupt human nature. The history of the world furnishes us with fearful proofs of the cruelty ever attendant upon bigotry and fanaticism. And almost every nation has been guilty of shedding blood upon the plea of furthering the cause of God. We read of Jews persecuting Christians, and then again Christians endeavouring to root out the Jews from the earth; harsh laws and edicts, unkindness and severity to a fearful extent have been their lot for many ages, and though now their case seems improved, and they are better treated in the various nations wherein they wander, occasionally they meet with a bitter reminder that they are tolerated, not beloved, or admitted to the privileges of national freedom. The sword of the False Prophet Mahomet was the means whereby he spread his doctrine of lies, and the bodies of many Christians are not yet mouldered in the grave, who became a prey to the fierce bigotry of Mahometans, the latter end of only the past year. And need I again remind you of the cruelties of Papal Rome, so manifested that, in the language of the Holy Spirit, she is 'drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus,' (Rev. xvii. 6,) 'wearing out the saints of the Most High,'

(Dan. vii. 25 ;) and to this day vowing to 'persecute and attack all heretics and dissenters?' Alas! the nature of persecution, has never altered, and the fury of Saul of Tarsus only one year after our Lord's ascension into heaven, has had multitudes of imitators from that time to the present. 'Tis true he 'did it ignorantly in unbelief,' (1 Tim. i. 13;) for having been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the 'perfect manner of the law of the fathers,' (Acts xxii. 3,) he regarded the Lord Jesus as an impostor, and says himself, 'that he thought he ought to do many things contrary to his name,' (chap. xxvi. 9;) thus, with all his learning, he was deplorably ignorant, and though he earnestly studied the 'law of the fathers,' he gained no knowledge of Him who alone is the 'Way, the Truth, and the Life.' A proud Pharisee, he despised the humble disciples of Jesus ; his sect had been strongly censured by the Lord of Life, who exposed its hypocrisy and condemned its inconsistency, therefore the mad bigotry of the young enthusiast determined that death must be the portion of all opposed to him and his principles.

"This, as I told you before, was just such an agent as the rulers wanted ; the miracles of the Apostles, the holiness of their doctrine, the purity of their lives, terrified them ; they saw the multitudes that followed them, and they felt their own authority giving way before a few ignorant men whom they heartily despised. Most gladly, therefore, after the martyrdom of Stephen, they listened to the persecutor's request, and gave him letters to the rulers to Damascus, that he might seek out the few Christians that resided there, and bring them bound to Jerusalem."

"How was this, Mr. C——?" said Mr. Basil.

"The power of life and death in the case of Jewish subjects accused of heresy," replied Mr. C——, "was vested only in the chief priests of Jerusalem, hence these Christians were to be sent bound to that city, that if they would not deny their faith, they might be condemned to death. But infinite mercy ordered otherwise; he who had been a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious, was, unknown to himself, a 'chosen vessel,' one who should declare the truth he once destroyed, and proclaim to distant lands the unsearchable riches of Christ. Yes, Saul the Persecutor started forth, accompanied by a chosen band, his heart full of pride at the idea of the im-

portant commission, his thoughts meditating upon having his revenge upon the hated sect, and afterwards receiving the thanks and praises of the rulers of his land,—he drew near to Damascus, when ‘suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven; and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?’

“The Christians of Damascus still retain the tradition of where this wonderful transaction occurred; about half a mile from the eastern gate of the town, the spot is shown to the curious traveller, and one who visited the city in 1835 thus speaks of it.—‘We turned,’ says he, ‘into a wide open road after leaving the city, and passing through a large unenclosed Christian country, soon reached the place, still highly venerated, of the Apostle’s miraculous conversion. The present track deviates from the straight line, bearing a few yards to the right, the precise spot believed to be that where he fell to the earth. This is evidently a portion of ancient road, consisting of firmly-imbedded pebbles, which, having never been broken up, stands alone like the fragment of an elevated causeway.’

“This, then, is the road whereon occurred one of the most wonderful events upon record, one of the most manifest displays of Divine grace. ‘Why persecutest thou me?’ What a question! This enthusiastic Pharisee thought himself employed in the service of God; he laid aside every feeling of tenderness and mercy for the sake of destroying the hateful sect, he thought ‘he ought to do many things contrary to Jesus of Nazareth,’ (Acts xxvi. 9;) and with a soul darkened with religious bigotry, ignorance, unbelief, and spiritual pride, he was thunder-struck at hearing the voice from heaven sternly demanding, ‘Why persecutest thou me?’ And how many there are to whom these words would apply, and who yet imagine themselves excellent people, zealous servants of the Lord Jehovah. With Saul, they exclaim, ‘Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.’ (Acts ix. 5.) A still further cause for astonishment—what! then all his zeal was sinful, all his endeavours to further the Jewish faith were rejected by heaven, and he himself declared the persecutor, not of a few feeble men and women, but of the Lord of Glory himself. What a lesson of warning and reproof, of encouragement and comfort, does this history display!”

"True, sir," said Hyford, "I feel it all, every word of it. In my days of vanity, when I thought it so clever in me to scoff at religion, I used to feel many an inward prick; and when I joined in the laugh against holy people, and you too, dear sir, amongst them, I would sometimes feel my cheek burn, and a voice whisper, 'Shame, John, thou art not half so fine a fellow as thou wouldst be taken for.' No, sir, conscience hit me hard, and at length my merciful Saviour met me, even as he did Saul of Tarsus, and filled me with shame and confusion of face."

"Ah, Master Hyford," said Mr. Lawrence, "the history of every man's conversion is a beautiful display of the power of grace alone. The Holy Spirit has recorded it here, for a further proof of infinite mercy, and to show the power of redeeming love."

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "thus the Apostle himself speaks of it; 'When it pleased God,' said he, 'who had separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them that were Apostles before me.' (Gal. i. 17.) Thus you see he was set apart even before he was born, but permitted during his early years to follow the dictates of his own mad will, that the power of grace might be even more displayed, and that it might be made manifest that conversion is the work of God the Holy Spirit only. Paul says, Christ was revealed to him; yes, in that light which exceeded the splendours of the sun, the Saviour appeared to accuse his creature of persecuting, not individuals, but himself. From his throne of glory the Lord Jesus acknowledges the union between himself and his people, though dwelling in light that no mortal can approach: he is the vine, his people still are the branches; he is the shepherd, his people are his flock; he is the head, his people are the members; he is the bridegroom, his people are his spouse, his bride, his beloved; no wonder then that those who persecute and ill-treat his redeemed and precious ones are visited with his utmost displeasure; and though for a season punishment is delayed, yet the day of vengeance is at hand, and the year of his redeemed is come, and he will demand the blood of all his servants from the beginning to the end of time, and recompense fury to his adversaries. But though he came forth against Saul, it was not only to stay his hand, but to make him a

monument of mercy ; hence he caused the trembling Pharisee to cry out, ' Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ? ' (Verse 6.) This is the first question the convinced sinner wishes to have answered ; humbled and overwhelmed with a sense of his vileness, his murders rising in judgment against him, his pride and arrogancy crumbled into dust, he desires to learn his master's will, and hastens to obey the orders he receives—' Go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. ' "

" Then he was to go to the city, sir ? " said Hyford.

" Yes," replied Mr. C——, " but in a very different manner from which he had anticipated entering it. He purposed dashing in, mounted on his charger, spreading terror and dismay amongst the Christians, and hailed with delight by the savage Jews ; but, instead, behold him trembling and humbled, blind and contrite ; the terrors of God set themselves in array against him : so true is it that ' The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity ; but a wounded spirit who can bear ? ' " (Prov. xviii. 14.)

" What must the men have thought that were with him ? " observed Hyford.

" From different verses in the Acts," replied Mr. C——, " we gather what were their feelings on the occasion. The exceeding brightness of the light must have terrified the horses, and caused them to throw them, for Paul says ' they were all fallen to the earth,' (chap. xxvi. 14 ;) and ' they stood speechless,' riveted to the spot."

" Excuse my interrupting you, Mr. C——," said Mrs. Basil: " in the ninth chapter, seventh verse, it says, they heard a voice, but saw no man—while in the twenty-second chapter, ninth verse, it says, they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. How do you reconcile these opposite verses ? "

" It may be taken two ways," replied Mr. C——, " either that they heard the voice of Paul speaking to Christ, but heard not Christ's voice to him ; or if they heard the sound of the voice, they could not understand what it said, for the word translated *heard* also signifies *understood*. When the trembling object of Divine mercy recovered the shock he had received, it was said to him, ' Rise, and stand upon thy feet : for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee ; ' (chap. xxvi. 16.) He then proceeds to tell him that his

great mission was to the Gentiles, those heathen nations, sunk in all the depravity and ignorance of idolatry, but to whom the word of salvation was to be sent, that so they might be turned from the power of Satan to serve the living God. Obedient to the command, he arose from the earth, and was obliged to be led by his attendants into Damascus, where, for three days, he appeared to be left to himself. But was it so? we shall see : and if you turn to the tenth verse, you will find that he was carefully watched over and tended by him who had called him, and was providing both for his instruction and restoration to sight. An old disciple dwelt at Damascus ; ' and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus : for, behold, he prayeth.' Observe this, my friends ; attend to what the all-seeing God says of the now humbled Saul. ' Behold, he prayeth.' Why then, he had never prayed before ; and yet as a Pharisee, and he was a very strict one, he had certainly said his prayers five times a-day at least, and yet never prayed. Oh ! how much we may all learn from this. It is not saying a collection of words that is prayer ; it is not loud speaking or the muttering of the lip—prayer is the language of the heart, the earnest desire of the soul, pouring out its wants into its Heavenly Father's ear ; it may not consist of ten words, and yet it is a prayer that is heard by the High and Lofty One.

"When Moses at the head of the bands of Israel was in a fearful difficulty, with the army of Pharaoh behind and the raging sea before, it is written—' And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me?' (Exod. xiv. 15;) and yet apparently Moses had not spoken. When Hannah prayed for the Lord to be gracious to her, it is said, ' she spake in her heart ;' (1 Sam. i. 13;) and her petition was heard and answered. Yes, this is prayer ; the language of the soul desiring help, the sense of sin and a longing after holiness, the feeling of helplessness, and an earnest longing after heavenly aid ; and this was the prayer of Saul. ' What wouldst thou have me to do?' was the first petition he had ever uttered, and soon it was answered, for he was to go into the city and there he would be taught. Truly we must ask for the spirit to help our infirmities, for ' we know not how to ask for anything as we ought,' and we must entreat the gracious

Saviour to plead our cause for us, and both teach us how to pray, as well as what to pray for, that so we may find acceptance before God.

“Ananias was reluctant to obey the Divine command; the savage cruelties of Saul had filled the Christians with dismay, and they knew that his mission at this time to the city was to bind all that called upon the name of Jesus. The faith, therefore, of this old disciple failed him, he forgot that God’s children are immortal as long as he has any work for them to perform, and that he who called him to work, would watch over and shield him from harm. He therefore replied, ‘Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.’ (Verses 13, 14.) That was true; but no matter now—he who had called him, had transformed the lion into the lamb, and by the power of his grace had compelled him to cry out for mercy; yes, and he should obtain it too, for he was a chosen vessel, fitted and prepared by the Lord the Spirit for the work whereunto he was appointed, and was to go forth, no more as Saul the Persecutor, but Paul the Apostle, standing before kings and rulers with undaunted boldness, and proclaiming to thousands the unsearchable riches of Christ. The joyful news of his acceptance with God quickly dispelled every anxious feeling from the mind of Ananias: he hastened to fulfil his grateful mission, and quickly found the object of his search, saying to him, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.’ (Verse 17.) Those who have felt the terrors of conscience, and trembled under a sense of guilt, can understand the joy and gratitude wherewith he heard these words of comfort; his past cruelties had in those days of blindness risen up before him, and he had been told by the offended Majesty of heaven that the persecutions he had committed were against Jesus himself; but now that he is looking for vengeance he hears the voice of mercy, and that he is set apart for his service, being appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles, (2 Tim. i. 11.) Oh, how wonderful was this! what a proof of the free grace of God, which alone could work such marvels, and which was manifested to Saul by the scales falling from his eyes, and his being immediately

endowed with the Holy Ghost, imparting to him the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, and giving to him the same miraculous powers as to the other Apostles, thus making him one of that select and holy body. As soon as he recovered from the astonishment produced by all that had happened, he arose and was baptized, thus openly professing himself the disciple of Jesus, and partaking of the ceremony which admitted him into the newly-established church of Christ. Before we quit this part of our subject," continued Mr. C——, "I would just make one remark which is worthy of notice, namely, that until the time of Cornelius, we do not read of any instance wherein the Holy Spirit was bestowed *after* baptism; if you search diligently you will find that it is recorded of all that they believe first, which is the act of the Spirit of God alone, and *then* are baptized; hence we learn that they were baptized because they were renewed or regenerated, not regenerated because they were baptized; and truly there is all the difference."

"Very true, sir," observed Mr. Lawrence, "I quite agree with you: before you proceed it may be interesting to some of our friends here, if I, as an old traveller, tell them that the people of Damascus still have a street they call *Straight*, about half a mile in length, traversing the city from east to west. They pretend to point out the house of Judas, with whom Paul lodged, and where also is a tomb, which tradition says, is that of Ananias, and a portion of the town to this day is called 'the quarter of Ananias.' But do not let me interrupt you."

"As soon as Saul was converted," resumed Mr. C——, "he began to act; the mercy he had received, the wonders of redeeming love, and the powerful operations of the gracious Spirit, became his constant theme; his whole soul was filled with the wondrous truth, 'that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;' and the eloquence and fervour wherewith he proclaimed this doctrine in the synagogues amazed his hearers, and while it rejoiced the hearts of the disciples, brought down upon himself the rage and hatred of the Pharisaic rulers.

"Then persecution raised its head against him; then these vile hypocrites thirsted for his blood; then he experienced the truth of what he proclaimed to others, that 'all who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution;' and had it not been for the zeal of the disciples

who concealed him, and at length enabled him to flee, he had fallen into the hands of his cruel enemies. As soon as he escaped, he tells us, he did not go to Jerusalem, but into Arabia, where he laboured diligently teaching the people the word of life. He returned again to Damascus, but the enmity against him was as rife as before, and the city being in the hands of Aretas, an Arabian king, the governor appointed by him assisted the Jewish rulers to apprehend him; but 'through a window in a basket he was let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.' (See 2 Cor. xi. 33.)"

"Yes," interrupted Mr. Lawrence, "and the Christians now dwelling there pretend to point out the very spot, namely, at an old gate, which has been long walled up on account of another being very near it."

"Damascus is a very ancient city, sir, is it not?" demanded Mr. Hill.

"One of the most so in the world," replied Mr. Lawrence; "we read of it as early in the Bible as the fourteenth chapter of Genesis, at the time of the battle of the kings, when Abraham was eighty-four years old, that is, in the year of the world 2083."

"Do many persons professing Christianity live there now, Mr. Lawrence?" said Mrs. Basil.

"When I was there, Madam," replied Mr. Lawrence, "it was supposed to contain about 5,000 Greeks and 5,000 Latins and Armenians; but alas! there is no real vital religion amongst them. I sought for it in vain, and thought upon the faithful disciples who dwelt there in the days of Saul, and were sufficiently numerous to be objects of hatred and persecution."

"Three years had elapsed," resumed Mr. C——, "since the period of Saul's conversion to the time of his escaping in the basket; he then went to Jerusalem, and endeavoured to join himself to the disciples in that city; but naturally enough they were all afraid of him, not having heard of his miraculous conversion, and subsequent zeal in preaching the faith which once he so heartily laboured to destroy. They had not forgotten the furious bigotry wherewith he had persecuted their friends, nor the eagerness that attended the martyrdom of Stephen, and nothing would induce them to believe he was indeed a disciple, until Barnabas, who had perhaps received more information concerning him, brought him to the Apostles, Peter and James, (see Gal. i. 18, 19,) and declared unto them

how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and that he gave evidence of the truth and sincerity of his conversion by his boldness in preaching the word of Christ. But in Jerusalem likewise, bonds and imprisonment awaited him; the enemies of Jesus were preparing for his destruction, but infinite mercy interposed. He informs us, the Saviour who had called him again appeared to him, not to reproach him for his sins, but to honour him with a commission of mercy to the Gentile world. Yes, my dear friends, the time had arrived for the Gentiles also to receive the word of God, for the glad sounds of the gospel of salvation to be proclaimed to distant lands, and 'for all the ends of the world to see the salvation of our God.' To us, therefore, has the word of reconciliation arrived; we, too, are no more 'strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God'—the flock belonging to Jesus, who graciously declared his determination of uniting it with his original one, and thus having 'one fold under one shepherd.' Oh what glad tidings are these for us poor Gentile sinners! may the Lord the Spirit make us more sensible of them, and add unto the Church daily such as shall be saved."

No. 46. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,

AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

Dorcas.



LONDON:
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THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

How many and various are the duties of a minister of God's holy word ! He is not only to act with watchfulness and vigilance, as the shepherd of the flock committed to his charge, but he must be the prudent, skilful physician, wounding in order to heal, and oftentimes administering nauseous draughts in order to cure ;—in other words, speaking the truth with all sincerity, and pointing out with tenderness and affection whatever he sees wrong in any of his people. Thus it was with our favourite pastor, Mr. C—— : the weekly assemblage at the Court had given him a further insight into the characters of his wealthier neighbours than he might otherwise have attained. With the tempers and dispositions of his poorer flock he was well acquainted ; they could seldom deceive him ; he knew his richer friends possessed the same evil hearts, and failings, and if they acted differently, in many of them it was to be attributed to education, whereby they learned to conceal feelings and dispositions equally displeasing to a pure and holy God. This is a truth oftentimes forgotten. We are displeased with the humble cottager for his bursts of temper, his selfishness and hardness of heart ; alas ! we seek not for the same faults in the rich, though scarcely a day passes wherein they may not be found, accompanied by many an additional circumstance of ungodliness and sin. They little think of the evil they produce, naturally looked up to as examples. Too often the wealthy Squire and his family are the greatest hindrances the village rector meets with in the performance of his duty, and the improvement of his people ; and it is not until we learn to “ cease from man,” and from taking him as our guide, that we are able to value the

plain and simple rule for our conduct, laid down in the word of God.

Mr. C——'s desire and prayer was, to act faithfully towards all his people, but at the same time without respect of persons. Many excellent people used to attend his weekly lecture at the Court, the end of whose existence was, to endeavour to love and serve God, both "outwardly in their bodies, and inwardly in their souls;" they were, in fact, true Christians, and as such were his greatest assistants and comforts, his dearly beloved in the Lord, his joy and crown; but there were others, who "had the form of godliness without the power thereof," who were "ignorant of God's righteousness, and went about to establish their own righteousness," and thus departed from the simplicity of the Gospel of Christ; the faults observable in these he was earnestly desirous of correcting, and like a skilful doctor, he set about endeavouring first to discover the disease, and then apply the remedy. He recollected that the next historical event that occurred in order, was first the death, and then the restoration to life, of Dorcas or Tabitha, whose loss was so deeply deplored in the Church, on account of her kindness and unwearied charity to her poorer brethren. And this word "charity," thought Mr. C——, how little it is understood! truly, if I am able to-day to render its meaning plainer, I shall rejoice at the opportunity afforded me, and I trust that those who have been Christians only in name, may learn that the gospel must be followed not in word only, but also in deed and in truth. Thus communing within himself, he entered the room, where every seat was occupied by anxious and admiring hearers. Upon opening his Bible he remarked, that little had been related of the acts of the Apostles who generally resided at Jerusalem, watching over and governing the affairs of the infant Church; "but," proceeded Mr. C——, "we now find it mentioned that Peter went through various parts of the land of Judea, visiting those persons who had received the word of God, and strengthening their faith in what they had been taught. He then visited the saints residing at Lydda."

"Pardon me, sir," interrupted Hyford, "but who are meant by the Saints?"

"All Christians, every sincere professor of the faith of Christ," replied Mr. C——, "he who believes in Jesus, and looks to him alone for forgiveness of sin, for holiness, happiness, peace, and joy."

"Then the word Saint," rejoined Hyford, "is not applicable only to the Apostles?"

"No," replied Mr. C——; "if you turn to the beginning of the Epistles, you will find the inspired writers addressing their friends as saints, that is, the '*beloved of God*,' (Rom. i. 7,) '*the sanctified in Christ Jesus*,' (1 Cor. i. 2,) '*the faithful in Christ Jesus*,' (Eph. i. 1;) these are the titles of the redeemed in every nation, and under every clime; called, and chosen, and faithful, they walk consistently with their high and holy profession, Christians not in name only, but in reality. Still further to confirm the faith of the new believers, a remarkable succession of miracles was performed, two of which it is my pleasure to be permitted to notice at this time. The first relates to a poor bedridden man, who had suffered from palsy eight years, and undoubtedly despaired of receiving any relief. But oh! how delightful a change awaited him! Peter, the servant of that dear Saviour who 'went about doing good, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease,' gladly employed the miraculous gift bestowed on him, and hastening to the bed of the sufferer, said to him, '*Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed.*' (Acts ix. 34.) Peter at once gives the honour where alone it is due; the power of Jesus, and faith in his name, alone produced these wonderful effects, and proved the truth of his word, that in spirit he would ever be with his people, and lead them onwards to their journey's end. The effect of this miracle was, to convince the heathen inhabitants of Lydda and Saron that their idols were '*lying vanities*,' and that the Lord Jehovah alone is the right object for the adoration of man. Lydda was about eight miles from Joppa, and was a celebrated place for Jewish learning before the destruction of Jerusalem. There are a few poor Christians now living there, and they show the ruins of a church, which was said to have been built by one of our kings of England. Saron is supposed to have been a plain or valley, extending from Cæsarea to Joppa, and a thickly inhabited spot, so that the Apostle had considerable inducement to continue there. But a still further demonstration of the Divine goodness and power was soon to be displayed; the Most High directs every event, the various occurrences of life, and renders them subservient to his glory. There is no such thing as chance. The word has no place in the dictionary of the Christian. No, his God

guides, directs and rules all his concerns for him ; they may appear to him as contrary as possible, but never mind, he feels sure all will be right at last, and when in the land of peace, far removed from all this world's care and toil, he looks back upon the past, and sees the way whereby his Lord has led him, he will indeed rejoice that through grace he was enabled to proceed amidst all the snares laid for him, and the discouragements that assailed him on every side, and he will hasten to pour out his praises and thanksgivings to Him who upheld and kept him steadfast unto the end ; for, my dear friends," added Mr. C——, "salvation is free from first to last, the free gift of our gracious God for the sake alone of our adorable Redeemer : to Him therefore be the praise. But to proceed. 'Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas : this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.' I must pause here for a moment," said the pastor, "for in the name given to this good woman there lies concealed a truth of exquisite beauty. If you turn to a Bible with marginal references, you will see that the meaning of 'Dorcas' is a '*doe*,' or the female of hart, or deer ; and immediately afterwards a reference to Canticles ii. 9, &c. Hence I see the union between Christ and his redeemed ; He is the 'hart upon the mountains of spices,' (viii. 14,) whilst she is a type of the bride, the Church of the living God.—And of what does that Church consist ? Of all people, and nations, and tongues : of a countless throng, a multitude that no man can number ; an army of conquerors, each and all of whom have fought the fight of faith, and shouted 'Victory.' It is of this glorious bride that Dorcas is the emblem, and her life, her death, and resurrection, present in glowing language the character and future triumph of the Church, when at the voice of the Archangel, the true and living Rock, even Jesus Christ, she rouses from her slumber of death, and stands before him clothed with glory and immortality."

"I understand this, sir," said Hyford, "but please to add more."

"The description of Dorcas," replied Mr. C——, "is that of the true believer in every age. The earnest wish of the real convert is, to know and practise his Lord's will. 'What wouldest thou have me to do ?' is the first question he asks, and his daily prayer is, to be led by the Spirit, in the path most in accordance with that ap-

pointed to him by his heavenly Father. It is one of the greatest mistakes imaginable, to suppose for a moment that faith and works are to be separate—it is impossible. So surely as a good healthy tree produces good fruit, so certainly the true believer in Jesus Christ brings forth the fruits of righteousness. But the error committed by so many persons is this,” added Mr. C——, “and is the cause of all the endless mistakes that are daily occurring; and producing such lamentable consequences; namely, they forget to put faith and works in their right place. Faith must go before—good works must follow. We do not expect table-fruit from a crab-stock.”

“That’s true,” muttered Hyford.

“No,” proceeded Mr. C——, “neither do you expect the carriage to move the horse.”

“Very true,” said Hyford, laughing.

“Well, then,” said Mr. C——, “if you are not astonished at neither of these impossibilities occurring, why should you expect a person, who knows nothing of faith in Jesus, beyond what is felt by the lost spirits themselves, to bring forth those holy fruits which are produced by the Lord the Spirit alone? or why should you wonder that a man spiritually dead should not act as if he were alive? No, my dear friends, it cannot be; the true believer works—yes, he works, and labours in his Master’s vineyard early and late. The instruction of his household, the furtherance of the gospel, the consistency required by his holy profession, are never lost sight of, either in thought, word, or deed. No one works with more zeal or diligence, and why? Is it that he may gain eternal life by his exertions? No; but because he *has* gained it by the exertions of another, even his loved Redeemer. ‘I live,’ says he, ‘and yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who has loved me, and given himself for me.’ (Gal. ii. 20.) The believer works *from* life: from that heaven-born principle implanted in him, by virtue of his union with Christ his Head: he does not think of working *for* life, because he knows that sin defiles every action, and that when he has done all that is commanded him, he is but an ‘unprofitable servant: he has only done that which it was his duty to do.’ (Luke xvii. 10.) This was the case with Dorcas. She became a believer, and ‘was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.’ (Acts ix. 36.) Nor was she singular in this; search the Bible

throughout, and you will find holiness of life accompany sincerity of profession, and even so it is and ever has been in the Church of Christ. The doctrine he preached must be practised, and those who profess to belong to him 'must be careful to maintain good works.' (Titus iii. 8.)"

"I suppose, sir," said Mrs. Walton, a lady who answered the description of those before spoken of, "I suppose, by good works you mean charity?"

"Good works, or alms-giving, madam," replied Mr. C——, "are a very small part of charity."

"Well, I do not understand that," she said: "I always thought that relieving the wants of others was charity. I know my poor mother continually told me so, and inculcated it by her example; for a more worthy, charitable person never lived. Her name was in every subscription-list, her ear was ever open to the tale of sorrow, she was always cutting out and contriving garments to clothe the naked; in short, sir, she was another Dorcas; was not this true charity, sir? If it was not, then I do not understand the meaning of the word."

"My dear madam," replied Mr. C—— mildly, "far be it from me to judge others; my business is to bring the word of God before you, leaving it to His Spirit to enable you to understand and apply it to yourselves. If we turn to the chapter wherein St. Paul defines the character of Christian charity, we shall discover that it includes more, much more than mere benevolence. Pardon me, Mrs. Walton, but you will find that we 'may give all our goods to feed the poor,' and yet be destitute of this Christian grace."

"Then what do you mean by charity, Mr. C——?" said the lady.

"Or rather, madam, what does the Holy Spirit mean by it?" replied Mr. C——. "We will first consider what it is not, and then what it is. It is not, being able to speak fluently; no, a man may possess the eloquence of angels, he may astonish hundreds by his oratory, and yet be destitute of charity. It is not the power of language or the elegance of diction that is of any value in the sight of God, and those who pride themselves upon possessing those brilliant gifts will hereafter weep at their deficiency in the only grace which would endow them with beauty before Him. Our Lord warned his hearers of this very thing; 'Many,' said he, 'will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in

thy name ? then will I profess unto them, I never knew you.' (Matt. vii. 22.) And St. Paul, too, felt the same ; for he said, 'I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection : lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.' (1 Cor. ix. 27.) Again, the Apostle speaks of possessing such a faith as would enable him to perform the most wonderful miracles, and yet be devoid of charity, in which case it would be all as nothing : for while true saving faith is ever united with charity, a dead, cold, speculative belief knows nothing about it ; yes, I must even go further," added the pastor, "and ask you where is the practical charity of those, who, making a great profession of love to God, do not scruple to persecute and think evil of those who differ from them in opinion, and imagine that thus they are doing God service."

"Very true," said Mr. Lawrence : "false religion is ever a persecuting power, it always has been so, and whether we turn over the pages of Scripture, or seek the details of history, we find one sad mournful tale, that the hand of man is always ready to be lifted against his brother if he differs from him in faith and practice. Alas ! charity can scarcely breathe or exist here below ; she must long to enter that abode where she is all in all."

"I feel much perplexed," said Mrs. Walton, looking from Mr. Lawrence to Mr. C—— ; "you have said so much as to what charity is not, that I desire to know what it is."

"To this part of our subject I hasten with true pleasure, madam," replied Mr. C—— ; "for under this name is set before us that genuine vital holiness which is summed up in one word, LOVE. This was the principle that influenced Dorcas ; a deep sense of the mercy she had received from Him who had converted her soul by his grace, taught her the preciousness of a Saviour, and induced her to devote her time and talents to His service. It was not only because the poor were deprived of her coats and garments that they wept, and so earnestly desired her to be restored to them : no, it was because she showed them what a true believer should be. Her love to God was manifested by her love to his people, and we may readily suppose she employed it by setting an example of gentleness and kindness, devoid of envy or pride ; for 'charity is not puffed up,' but in lowliness of mind esteems others better than herself, and, in few words,

'beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.' This, madam, is charity, that divine principle which is produced by God the Holy Spirit alone ; it is that lovely grace that in the person of the Redeemer once was seen in full perfection. And how beautiful is the reality ! how glorious an object ! how worthy of imitation ! He said to his disciples, 'A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another ; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.' (John xiii. 34, 35.) 'Charity never faileth.' No, for God himself is Love ; and the angels and spirits of the redeemed are bound with the same gentle cord, which produces one harmonious feeling, one general burst of praise. There is not one discordant voice in heaven ; 'Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,' is the untiring song of the immortals. Faith has been swallowed up in sight, and hope in fruition, or full enjoyment of that glory so long expected and desired ; but charity or love remains, never to be extinguished, but to live on, and shine brighter and brighter still, throughout the vast and countless ages of eternity."

"Oh, sir," said Hyford, "what a contrast is this to the earth, where our ears are deafened by the sounds of strife and discord, and where even the best regulated families often seem to forget there is such a thing in existence as Christian charity !"

"The deathbed of Dorcas is beautifully set before us," observed Mrs. Basil ; "the regret of the poor, the attention paid to her remains, all indicating the deep affection wherein she was held, are most interesting, and cause us to exclaim, 'May we die the death of the righteous, and may our latter end be like hers !'"

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "but those who die the death of the righteous must live their life ; and this is one living active principle of love—love to Christ, and love to man for his sake, and which will burn on continually as long as life exists ; and when the tabernacle of clay is cast aside, and the soul, clothed in the bright garments of immortality, enters the presence of her God, then will the little spark burst out into a bright and glorious flame, that shall continue for evermore. I have dwelt long on the character of Dorcas," added Mr. C——, "she is worthy of imitation—we want many such in the Church of Christ,

for they are valuable assistants to his ministers, and are often instrumental of deep and lasting good. We have little more to add on the subject, except to bring to your notice the different manner wherein Christ performed his miracles from his disciples. He stood forth in his own Almighty power, thus proving his divinity beyond a doubt; his disciples felt their weakness and insufficiency; 'Peter knelt down and prayed;' he asked assistance from above, and looked to his Lord alone for power. It was by miracles that the heathen were led to reflect upon the nature of Christianity, and, therefore, when this eminent saint again lived in the city, and pursued her holy calling, we cannot be surprised that such an event should be productive of wonderful effects, and cause many to reflect upon the nature of the faith newly introduced. 'And it was known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.' In this city Peter continued for some time, teaching the people, and as it was a sea-coast town of considerable importance, he had much employment, and by preaching the gospel to the sailors, would facilitate its being carried to other countries. Thus the kingdom of heaven is like leaven which gradually spreads and works its way, sometimes almost imperceptibly, then again with more rapidity, until hereafter it will be found one great and glorious truth extending from pole to pole, and from the rising to the setting sun."

"Is Joppa in existence now, sir?" said Hyford.

"It is," replied Mr. C—; "and no doubt Mr. Lawrence will tell you something about its present state, for he has been there."

All eyes were turned to that gentleman, who, with a smile, said to Mr. C—,

"This seems to be my department; well, I am very willing at all times to relate my adventures. This town was the first I entered in the Holy Land, and is about forty miles from Jerusalem on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. It is now known by the name of Jaffa, and though it is the usual landing-place for vessels bound to Syria, it is by no means a safe or commodious harbour, and I was greatly struck with the truth of the observations of Josephus, the Jewish historian, who continually mentions its unfitness for a good shelter or haven for vessels; in fact, the rocks and shoals are so dangerous that ships generally anchor about a mile further

on. The town has beautiful gardens on the eastern side, where the oranges and lemons are the largest I ever saw; and as for the water melons, their delicious flavour spoiled me for all I partook of afterwards. In this country," added Mr. Lawrence, "you have no idea of the richness and agreeableness of the fruit produced in those climates where they grow naturally, and where the heat renders them more acceptable to the taste than we can imagine. The chief manufactory of Joppa is soap, with which it supplies all the adjacent cities of importance. I tried, of course, to find out the house of Simon the tanner, wherein Peter lodged, but with all my willingness to believe, I could not think that the modern habitation I surveyed so anxiously, could be the object of my search: so I contented myself with fancying that it was rebuilt on the same site, for it certainly was on the sea-side and without the walls, which was according to the law preventing a tanner from carrying on his trade within the city, on account of the odour from the skins."

"I have one more remark to make," resumed Mr. C——, "before we close our history: that though many individuals were recalled to life by Christ and his Apostles, there is no instance of a prophet or eminent minister of religion being raised from the dead——"

"Pardon me if I interrupt you, sir," said Mrs. Walton; "was not St. Paul stoned to death at Lystra?"

"No, madam," replied Mr. C——; "turn to the chapter (xiv. 19, 20), you will see he was left for dead, but it does not say he was actually so; on the contrary, it would seem he was only insensible for a time, for while his friends stood round him, thinking he was taken from them, 'he rose up and went into the city,' and his wounds and bruises being miraculously healed, he departed the next day with Barnabas to Derbe. And the remark I made relative to the persons in the New Testament equally applies to the Old."

"This is very remarkable," observed Mrs. Basil, "I never observed it before, but you are right—and yet," added she, after a pause, "we would have naturally thought that these men, the active diligent labourers in the vineyard of God, were the most proper cases for divine interposition."

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "so man would argue; but how different are the ways and objects of Jehovah! When the work of his servants is completed, He calls them

hence. They have laboured faithfully in their Master's cause, and the time is come for them to rest. And what says the Spirit? 'Their works do follow them;' not, as the self-righteous, the Papist, would say, they go before, in order to plead that heaven is theirs by right—no, 'their works follow them,' proving that they are the Lord's people, and that they laboured to be holy in thought, word, and deed; not to gain eternal life by their deservings, but because they *were* saved and accepted in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose righteousness alone is their plea, and whose infinite merits have purchased for them life and immortality. This, my friends, is the doctrine preached and practised by the Apostles of Jesus, this was the principle that influenced Dorcas, and caused her mind to be ever suggesting some work of mercy and Christian love; may you go and do likewise, and endeavour to imitate the bright example set before you!"

NO. 47. N. T.]

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Cornelius



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1851.

THE NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

"WE have now entered upon a new and important portion of our New Testament Histories, my friends," said Mr. C——, when his party were, as usual, all assembled, "a portion full of interest, and the beginning of the fulfilment of those gracious words of the world's Redeemer, 'Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.' (John x. 16.) Yes, the time was arrived when 'to the Gentiles also God should grant repentance unto life;' when the veil that had, as it were, shut them out from light and immortality, should be rent in twain, and when all the world should be invited freely to partake of gospel blessings and gospel privileges. A Gentile had, it is true, been occasionally converted, but the number hitherto was very small; now the door of the Redeemer's kingdom was to be thrown wide open, never again to be closed, and into it all who would might enter and find acceptance. Oh! my friends, there is no boundary, no limitation to God's mercy in Christ Jesus; the heathen were given to him for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession; and from the time when the event before us occurred, which was seven years after the ascension of our blessed Lord, to the present hour, Gentiles have been continually drawn by the Holy Spirit out of darkness into light, and from the service of Satan to that of the living God."

"We are Gentiles, sir," said Hyford, "are we not?"

"Yes," replied Mr. C——; "all those who are not of the descendants of Abraham are Gentiles; they are called *Goiim*, which signifies people or nations who have not received the faith, or law of God. Before our Lord came, the Jewish religion, as revealed by God to Moses and the Prophets, was the only pure faith, the only road to eternal life; and those Gentiles who embraced that faith

were called proselytes. Now these proselytes were divided into two kinds—the ‘Proselytes of the Gate,’ who were Gentiles, but had renounced or given up idolatry, and united themselves to Israel, though they were neither circumcised, nor observed the ceremonial law, but were called ‘devout men and women,’ (see Acts x. 2, 7; xvii. 4, 17;) and the ‘Proselytes of the Covenant,’ who were Gentiles that were circumcised, and became subject to the whole law. Cornelius, of whom I am about to read, was a ‘Proselyte of the Gate.’

“Let us now turn to the tenth chapter of the Acts: ‘There was a certain man in Cesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.’ (x. 1, 2.) Cesarea was at this time a city on the coast of the Mediterranean sea, about thirty-five miles from Joppa, and one of the most celebrated towns in Palestine. It was built by Herod, surnamed the Great, who for twelve years spared no expense in its erection. The buildings were of white stone, and abounded in magnificent palaces and other edifices, either for business or amusement, and after it was finished, he made it his own royal residence, and in fact the ‘political’ capital of the country. As the time drew nigh for the destruction of the Jewish state and people, a fearful massacre of the inhabitants took place, arising from jealousy, which brought on that fatal war which ended in the dispersion of the nation. After a time, however, the city partly recovered itself, and became celebrated for its schools. It is now utterly desolate, a complete ruin, and no one lives within many miles of this once great and beautiful city. Such was the residence of Cornelius, who was a centurion, or commander of a hundred men in the Italian band, which belonged to the tenth legion, and attended the governor as his body guard. Though his calling was adverse to the growth of religion, still he was a devout man, and ‘one that feared God with all his house.’ Once a heathen, he had been taught by the Holy Spirit the sin and folly of his creed, and led to seek the God of Israel.”

“Do you think, Mr. C——,” said Mrs. Basil, “that Cornelius was the centurion who kept watch at the cross of Christ, and at the sepulchre?”

“I am inclined to think he was,” replied Mr. C——,

“but we have no record to prove it. The events attendant upon the death and resurrection of our blessed Lord were well known, and it is not improbable that, as Herod was at Jerusalem at that particular time (see Luke xxiii. 7), Cornelius, as the commander of his guards, would be appointed to carry out the views of his master and the chief priests, whose interest it was to prove the Divine Redeemer an impostor. But we read that the wonders attendant upon his crucifixion struck the Centurion with such awe, that he was led to exclaim, ‘Truly this was the Son of God,’ (Matt. xxvii. 54,) a fact fully confirmed on the morning of the resurrection, when the angel, armed with the power of Jehovah, descended from heaven, rolled away the ponderous stone, and struck such terror into the guards that they were paralysed with fear, and ‘became as dead men.’ It is by no means improbable that Cornelius was the commander; whoever guarded the cross and witnessed its accompanying horrors, would be naturally desirous to know the end; and as all the multitude assembled at Jerusalem, from Herod and Pilate to the lowest mendicant, were anxiously awaiting the arrival of the third day, wherein Jesus declared he would rise again, we may readily imagine the anxiety of the Roman soldiers, in common with others, to see the termination of such wonders. And then when Jesus rose—when the Conqueror of sin and death burst his bands, prostrated his heathen guards, confounded the malice of all his enemies, and, arrayed with immortality, proved the truth of his mission, his own Divinity, his Power, his Omnipotence, must we not suppose that the Centurion would be confirmed in his belief that truly he was none other than the Son of God, and that the Spirit which had graciously made known to him this truth, would lead him gradually onwards, until the time for the fuller display of divine love should arrive? According to the light bestowed upon him, Cornelius acted; devout in his own private life, he established the fear of God in his household; he had cast away his idols of wood and brass, of silver and gold, and felt that to the God of Israel alone belonged the kingdom, the power, and the glory. He proved by his life and conduct that the aim and object of his existence was to please God, and therefore he sought to do so by liberal acts of charity and unwearied constant prayer. But as yet he was ignorant; he knew not his Redeemer spiritually, as he who alone could present his soul faultless before God, and through

whom only he could find acceptance : but he was being led by an unknown path, and that Spirit who taught him to feel the depth of his infirmities, and the greatness of his wants, was even now teaching him how to pray and cry for guidance and direction. ' He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.' " (Verses 3, 4.)

" Then, Mr. C——," said Mrs. Walton, " surely from this we learn that our own good works are acceptable in the sight of God."

" Woe unto us if they were the conditions of our salvation," replied Mr. C——, " or that the *smallest* human merit was necessary for the attainment of eternal life. Oh! Mrs. Walton, the best action performed by men, when weighed in the balance of infinite justice, falls far short of what is required; and when a person in the pride of his heart thinks to render himself and his services acceptable to God, and expects to be received for his own sake, he will find he is miserably deceived. ' To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.' And again, ' When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear.' (Isa. i. 11—15.) Here, madam, is the state of the unhappy being who attempts to enter into the presence of the High and Lofty One in his own miserable righteousness; he has nothing but his natural flimsy robe wherewith to cover him; and what is the necessary consequence? In that dread hour when the soul stands before her God, she feels her desolation. Conscience bears testimony to the justice of Jehovah, and she looks in vain for a friend or advocate to plead her cause. In the season of life a Saviour had been offered, his merits were sufficient for salvation, his righteousness would have made her accepted. But pride, self-righteousness, and wilful blindness forbade her accepting terms wherein *human merit* was counted as nothing, and consequently, as old Bunyan says, when she came to seek for her evidences, they were not to be found;

and the fearful sentence passed upon such is, 'Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness.' (Matt. xxii. 13.)

"As I told you before, the true believer works, yes, he abounds in the fruits of righteousness, his meat and drink is to do his heavenly Father's will; but he works *from* life, not *for* life. And though we read of the prayers and alms of Cornelius having come up as a memorial before God, subsequent events prove that he was chosen in Christ Jesus, that 'he should be holy and without blame before him in love,' (Eph. i. 4,) living and acting according to the light bestowed upon him. He adhered to the Jewish customs which he had adopted upon forsaking heathenism, for we find that he was engaged in his devotions the ninth hour of the day, three o'clock in the afternoon, being the time of the evening sacrifice. We shall presently have occasion to allude to another hour set apart for the same holy purpose. When the heavenly visitant came to the pious Roman, he desired him to 'send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon whose surname was Peter. He lodgeth,' said he, 'with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea-side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.' (Verses 5, 6.)

"The whole of this transaction deserves notice," continued Mr. C——. "The angel himself could have explained to Cornelius the way of God more perfectly, and made him acquainted with the Gospel of Christ; but no: Peter is to be employed, he is to be the honoured instrument of declaring salvation to the Gentiles; he was to cast forth the Gospel net, and multitudes of the unconverted would joyfully enter it. Now was the promise of his Divine Master fulfilled, and it was to be manifested that 'in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.' (Gal. v. 6.) Overjoyed at the condescension of the Most High, the Centurion, upon the departure of the celestial messenger, hastened to obey his commands, and immediately despatched two of his household servants with a devout soldier that constantly waited upon him, to the Apostle at Joppa. The mind of Peter, as we shall presently see, was not yet divested of its Jewish prejudices, and he was obliged to be schooled and lectured into a more charitable feeling towards all men by the Spirit himself, otherwise he would not willingly have performed his destined task.

"Leaving the servants of the Centurion to pursue their journey, we will turn our attention to the Apostle, who was lodging with Simon the tanner, at Joppa. It seems that about the sixth hour Peter went upon the housetop to pray: this was about twelve o'clock, or noon. We find mention made in the Old Testament Histories of prayer being made at least three times a-day. David says, 'Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud,' (Psalm lv. 17.) 'Daniel kneeled upon his knees three times a-day, and prayed,' (Dan. vi. 10.) While Peter was therefore thus employed, 'he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance.'"

"A trance! sir," said Hyford, interrupting, "a trance! what does that mean?"

"In various ways God used to reveal his will to his servants," replied Mr. C——; "in fact, I think I can prove to you *seven* different methods he adopted. First, by dreams, as in the cases of Joseph, Pharaoh's butler and baker, and Pharaoh himself, Jacob (Gen. xxviii.), Abimelech (Gen. xx. 6), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. ii.) Secondly, by appearing openly, as to Abraham (Gen. xvii. 1), to Isaac (Gen. xxvi. 2), to Moses (Exod. iii. 2), to Solomon (1 Kings ii. 9.) Thirdly, by visions, when they were asleep, as to Samuel (1 Sam. iii. 15), to Isaiah (vi. 1), to Daniel often. Fourthly, by a voice, as to Moses (Exod. xix. 19), to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. iv. 31), to Peter in this trance (Acts x. 13, 15), to John (Rev. i. 12). Fifthly, by Urim (Numb. xxvii. 21). Sixthly, by inspiration, such as Job speaks of, (xxxii. 8,) and which we can understand, having, I trust, in our own experience, enjoyed those inward divine influences which lead us onward in our appointed path, and often cheer us with a sense of our Father's presence while engaged in pursuing the line of duty he has marked out for us. And this brings me to the seventh and last manner whereby the Lord revealed his will, namely, by a trance, as it is called in our chapter, but which really means an ecstasy, as St. Paul, when he said, 'he was caught up into Paradise,' (2 Cor. xii. 2,) or St. John, who says, 'he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day,' (Rev. i. 10,) so filled with a sense of the divine presence, that he was sensible of nothing besides. Thus it was with Peter. No sooner had he fallen into his trance, than he saw heaven opened, and a vessel similar to a large sheet let down to the earth. 'In

it were contained beasts of the earth, wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And a voice came to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.' (Verses 10—12.) Immediately his Jewish prejudices arose against the Divine command, and he refused, saying, 'Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.'

"How strange all this appears!" said Hyford; "it seems as if the fear and dread we should have, if we heard the voice of God, was unknown to Peter."

"He was permitted thus to act," replied Mr. C——, "that the mercy and love of the Lord Jehovah might be made still more manifest. The time was come for all the ends of the world to see the salvation of our God, for the light to shine upon the dark nations of the Gentiles; the branches of the wild olive were to be engrafted upon the good and faithful stem, and 'no longer to be strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, Jesus Christ himself being the chief Corner-stone.' Listen therefore to the divine reply, 'What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.' All kinds of creatures had appeared in vision to the Apostle, any of which he might select for food, for all now were equally clean. By this, no doubt, it was intended to represent the individuals of the Gentile nations, whose fierce tempers and savage dispositions were to be brought under the mild influences of the Gospel, and men who had grovelled even as reptiles upon the earth, were to be cleansed and sanctified by the regenerating power of the Lord the Spirit."

"How truly has all this been verified!" exclaimed Mr. Lawrence; "the history of thousands of individuals proves it. Look at New Zealand, that land of the cannibal, the eater of human flesh; there, at this present time, are no fewer than 5,213 persons who, having been taught the value of a Saviour, constantly frequent his table and partake of the emblems of his dying love. How delightful to hear of the once bloody-minded chief, Rauparaha, now more than eighty years of age, laying aside his horrible weapons of war, and every morning seen in his place, learning, even as a little child, the gospel lessons of peace and love! Yes; these people once were notorious through the world for their savage ferocity, but now what a contrast! A gentleman who visited one of the stations writes word that on the Sabbath he was there, there was a congregation of between 700 and 800. The large church was

full to overflowing, and the service of the Church of England was performed with a fervour and sincerity that could not be surpassed.

"I must tell you one story more," continued Mr. Lawrence, with a smile, "and then I must apologise to our good pastor for his forbearance and patience. Amongst the deathbeds of many recorded in the Missionary reports of the last year, that of Samuel Wilson, an African, is one of the most interesting. He had been ill a short time, but the day before he was removed he walked with his wife to see the new church now building at Freetown, West Africa. He expressed much pleasure at its progress, and told her it was there she must worship. They went to rest. Soon afterwards his wife awoke and missed him. She got up to look for him, and found him in another room engaged in prayer. She begged him to lie down, which he did, but soon rose again, and when she wished him to return to his bed, he told her to '*hush!*' as he was engaged with his Maker. Thus he continued through the night until the break of day, conversed with his friends, and seemed better. He then lay down, as if composing himself for sleep, and in a short time died, his happy spirit taking its glorious flight without a struggle. And now, sir," said Mr. Lawrence, "I would ask your pardon for interrupting you, but I feel my stories are a correct commentary upon your most interesting chapter."

"Truly they are," replied Mr. C—, "and we thank you for them. Yes, God said, what he had cleansed was no longer to be accounted common; and behold the consequences! the dark places of the earth, once the abodes of blood and crime, now behold the light of truth, and the whole history of our missions is one glorious detail of the faithfulness of Jehovah, who is preparing a vast and glorious Church against that day when the Redeemer shall come forth and gather his elect from the four quarters of the habitable globe. But now we must turn to Peter: the thrice repeated visit of the mysterious sheet and its strange burthen, filled him with wonder, and as he lay upon the house-top, he pondered what it could possibly mean; that it came from God was beyond a doubt, but its import remained to be revealed. At length the messengers of Cornelius arrived, and demanded whether Peter lodged there: before he could be summoned to attend them, the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee

down, and go with them, doubting nothing : for I have sent them.' (Acts x. 19, 20.) This was enough, now the mystery was explained ; he saw at once that God had a work for him to perform, and he hastened to execute it. He began also to perceive his mission was to the Gentiles, and, therefore, he invited the men to rest, and the next day, accompanied by some friends, set out for Joppa. 'The morrow after they entered into Cesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends. And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up ; I myself also am a man.' (Verses 24—26.) Cornelius, perfectly satisfied that Peter would return with his messengers, had collected several of his friends, that they also might have an opportunity of hearing those truths that he so earnestly awaited ; the sight of the man of God, however, so filled him with awe and respect, that he fell down at his feet in the attitude of worship ; but Peter hastened to remove him from a posture so unbecoming, and told him to rise."

"In this transaction, sir," said Mr. Lawrence, "I have often thought Cornelius had no intention of *worshipping* Peter, though that is the word made use of in our translation ; but when we reflect that the manners of the eastern nations have scarcely changed in the least, I can bear testimony to the fact that nothing more was meant than an act of salutation."

"Whatever it was," said Mr. Basil, "Peter refused to accept it ; and it would be well if he who regards himself as Peter's successor, namely, the Pope, would read this chapter and imitate the conduct of the Apostle he professes to adore. When he gives his embroidered slipper to his benighted admirers to kiss, how little he imitates Peter, who would not receive the usual mode of homage from Cornelius !"

"Very true," said Mr. C——; "and when Cornelius rose, in reply to Peter's inquiry, he set forth in a simple, yet manly way, the reason wherefore he sent for him, adding, 'Immediately therefore I sent to thee ; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.' (Verse 33.) This appeal was immediately replied to by the Apostle, who hastened first to speak of his Jewish prejudices, and then to show the

wonderful manner whereby God himself had taught him that now 'neither circumcision availed anything, nor uncircumcision,' but a change of heart, a new and holy principle which alone could be produced by the Holy Spirit, and would be made manifest by its fruits. He spake of the general knowledge that prevailed as to the life of Jesus, and which was well known in distant lands, and after speaking of himself and his brethren as the appointed witnesses of his resurrection, he proceeded to declare the glorious truth, 'that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission or pardon of sins.' (Verse 43.) No sooner had he proclaimed this glorious truth, the sum of the everlasting gospel, than God himself bore testimony to its truth by bestowing upon Cornelius and his friends the gift of the Holy Ghost; another striking proof, Mr. Martin," added Mr. C——, "that Baptism is not Regeneration."

"I am obliged to give that doctrine up," replied Mr. Martin; "you have taken all my props away, and I have nothing left to support me; but please to proceed."

"Observe," resumed Mr. C——, "in some cases the Holy Spirit was bestowed after baptism, in others before, and in others again when the parties were neither circumcised nor baptized, that we may learn that 'God does not confine himself to outward signs,' for after all, 'It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing,' (John vi. 63;) and what St. Paul says of the Jew is equally applicable to the Gentile, that 'he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.' (Rom. ii. 28, 29.) Here, my friends, is true regeneration, that holiness of heart which is quite distinct from outward signs and ordinances, and which is bestowed by the Lord the Spirit upon each man severally as he will. The effect produced upon these Gentiles was the same as upon the Jews at the day of Pentecost, they began to speak in various tongues unknown to them before, and to proclaim the wonders of redemption even as those who had come to teach them; proving that they also were chosen of God to declare the glad tidings of salvation, and that they were to make known to others the unsearchable riches of Christ. Seeing the manifest acceptance of those people into the Church of Christ,

well might Peter exclaim, 'Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?' Surely not. Baptism is the sign whereby the believer is outwardly admitted into covenant with God, and thus Peter acted with regard to Cornelius, in compliance with the command of Jesus, who 'desired his disciples 'to go forth and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' Truly this history should be precious to us who are Gentiles, and while we meditate upon that grace and love which made us partakers in the covenant of mercy which so long appertained to the Jews alone, we should pray for this our elder brother that he may be restored to the blessings he has lost, and that we may both be made one in Christ Jesus our Lord."

No. 48. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,

AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

Peter's Vindication,
AND
The Acts of the Apostles.



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1851.

THE NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

THE party as usual began to assemble at M—— Court. As they slowly proceeded on their way under the warm beams of a summer's sun, it was delightful to watch them from the windows of the mansion, walking together in small friendly groups, deeply intent upon some subject that evidently engrossed their complete attention. Our warm-hearted old favourite Hyford appeared quite excited, and when he espied Mr. Lawrence in the distance coming in an opposite direction, he left his companions, Farmers Smith and Hill, to themselves, in order to meet that gentleman, and as he expressed it, "have some talk with him." Mr. Lawrence greatly admired the worthy man; his eccentricities amused him, while his pure, simple holiness of character deeply interested him; and it was one of his greatest pleasures to relate to him some tale connected with his abode in foreign countries, and which the old man listened to with the delighted interest of a child. Upon the present occasion he had watched the movements of Hyford in the distance, and when he found him wending his way across the lawn towards himself, he hastened to meet him. After the first salutations were over, Mr. Lawrence observed:—

"The chapter read by Mr. C—— last week was calculated to afford deep subject for consideration."

"Yes, sir," replied Hyford, "and it was on that very account that I have now taken the liberty of joining you. I have thought very much of the mercy of God in declaring the Gentiles equally acceptable to himself with his Jewish people; and yet why not? did he not create all, and does he wish a few to be saved, and many to perish? Oh no, a father of a family loves all his children; I am

sure I do ; and if such a sinful creature as I am has this feeling, what must the love of our covenant God be, who sent his dear Son to die for us, and has given us his word to teach us how to know and serve him !”

“ True,” replied Mr. Lawrence, “ the history of the Gentile Church is full of deep interest ; from the days of Cornelius unto the present hour, it contains nothing but a succession of facts, exhibiting infinite love and faithfulness ; and whether we read the Mission history abroad, or look into events nearer home, all is one great and glorious comment upon the text, that ‘ God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ ”

“ The Mission history,” slowly repeated Hyford, “ the Mission history—yes, that is it ; I have thought so much of the death-bed of that poor African.”

“ It was very interesting,” replied Mr. Lawrence, “ and I have brought a letter with me to-day, giving a further account of the sincerity of faith, and holiness of practice, amongst those our poor sable brethren, which affords an example worthy of our own imitation. I would read it to you now, but I see we are distanced by our friends and must enter the house.”

Hyford looked disappointed, but he said nothing, and in a few minutes afterwards was completely absorbed in listening to Mr. C——, who opened his book at the 11th chapter of the Acts. “ And the apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.” (Verses 1—3.)

“ How curious were the Jewish prejudices of these early Christians !” remarked Mr. Lawrence ; “ they could not part with their ceremonies, and consequently imagined that the law of Moses was yet to be observed in all its strictness.”

“ Yes,” replied Mr. C——, “ until the truth is fully known, narrowness of mind and bigotry frequently strive for the mastery ; but no sooner does the full light of the glorious Gospel shine forth than these unworthy principles disappear, and love to man for Christ’s sake takes possession of the soul, and, like its divine Author, embraces all who love the Saviour. It was to rebuke this unworthy principle we find St. Paul reproving his Corinthian con-

verts, some of whom declared they were followers of the Apostle, others of Apollos, and others again of Cephas or Peter; as if each of these men were the supreme head, and, in plain words, the idol of their respective flocks, to the exclusion of Jesus their only Master. Well may Paul indignantly exclaim, 'Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?' (1 Cor. i. 13 :) and how common an error is this in the present day! I fear we have not a town in this Christian country, where this party feeling does not more or less prevail; one says, I am a follower of Mr. B——; another, of Mr. C——; a third, of Mr. D——; and while, perhaps, these servants of Christ are uniting together to promote his cause, which they undoubtedly will do if they seek only his glory and not their own popularity, their people are making idols for themselves, which may be compared to clouds which obscure from the view the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness. My dear friends," added Mr. C——, "I am earnest on this point: my desire is to lead you direct to Jesus, and to none other. Oh! do not be satisfied with the creature instead of the Creator; one of the present fatal errors is the exaltation of man, and against this I would affectionately warn you. 'Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?' (Isa. ii. 22,) is the exhortation of the prophet, and yet how deplorably is it unheeded!"

"Well, sir," said Hyford, "you will not let us make an idol of you, even if we were so disposed: and yet I must tell you, we are deeply attached to you."

"That may be, my good friend," replied Mr. C——, with a smile, "I believe it; and I assure you it is reciprocal, for ye are truly my 'joy and crown,' and I look forward to the day when, surrounded by my beloved ones, I shall, I trust, be able to say, 'Here I am, and those whom thou hast given me;' while we enjoy that pure friendship and esteem which should exist between a minister and his people, let the love of Christ be the cord which unites us not only to each other, but to all those who love our Lord, whether of our communion or not. True religion does not consist in outward forms; it will not be demanded hereafter *where* we worshipped, but *how* we worshipped: the bigotry of Peter with regard to the calling of the Gentiles was just the same as the jealousies in our own day amongst Churchmen and Dis-

senters ; and think you a line of distinction will be drawn in heaven, and each sect and party kept distinct ? Oh no ! there all these divisions are unknown ; all are children of the same Father, all are united in thought, word and deed ; and I often long for the time when there will be ‘neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free : but Christ is all, and in all.’ (Col. iii. 11.)”

“How opposite is the doctrine of the Bible to that of popery !” observed Mr. Lawrence ; “in the text you have quoted, Christ is all in all, but the papist exalts himself ; with him, man and his laws are everything, but the Bible teaches of none but Christ ; the papist, like the Jew, declares that salvation can only be found within the Church—the Bible declares that all that believe in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved ; the worship of the papist consists in forms, and ceremonies, and outward observances, but the Bible says, that ‘God is a Spirit, and those who worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.’”

“Yes,” replied Mr. C——, “may our creed be truth ; may God be seen and felt amongst us, and may all our contests consist in ‘provoking one another unto love and to good works : not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is ; but exhorting one another : and so much the more, as we see the day approaching.’ (Heb. x. 24, 25.)

“Let us now turn to our chapter, and see how the apostle got out of the difficulty the mistaken bigotry of his brethren produced. He entered into the whole of the circumstances with them, and simply detailed how God himself had graciously declared that the Gentiles were no longer to be shut out from the privileges and blessings of the Gospel, but that now they were to be ‘fellow-heirs of the grace of life,’ and regarded as a part of the great family of the redeemed ; and though we have before considered the interesting narrative of Cornelius, I would make this important remark, that in relating the story to the brethren, the apostle mentions that the command to the centurion was, ‘Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter ; who shall tell thee words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.’ (Verses 13, 14.) You see this has nothing to do with the prayers and alms of Cornelius ; it was not those that were to save him, or which were to be in any measure the

means of recommending him to the divine favour : no ; throughout the Bible you will find no mention made of any man being saved by his own works or deservings ; salvation for all, my dear friends, is the free gift of God in Christ Jesus, and there is no other way whereby we can enter into heaven. ‘He is the way, the truth, and the life,’ and none can approach the Father but by him. Peter was to tell Cornelius ‘*words* :’ what could those be, of such mighty import as would produce so wonderful an effect as to cause him and his house to be saved ? We must look back to our former chapter, and there we shall find him simply preaching ‘peace by Jesus Christ, the Lord of all :’ proving him to be the Anointed of God, for the purpose, first, of teaching the way of salvation, and then sealing the truth with his blood, and on the third day rising triumphant from the tomb, proving thereby that ‘it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead ; and that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.’ (Chap. x. 36—43.) This was the doctrine Peter preached, and which the Lord Jehovah acknowledged by pouring down the Holy Spirit upon all who heard it, giving undeniable proof, that the Gentiles were to be fellow-heirs with the Jews “of the grace of life.”

“Let me ask you one question, sir,” said Mr. Smith ; “What is the meaning of God having ‘granted unto the Gentiles repentance unto life ?’ (Verse 18.)”

“It shows,” replied Mr. C——, “the divine nature of true repentance ; it is the gift of God, the fruit of the Spirit, which alone can soften the naturally hard proud heart of man, and in the language of the Bible, change it into a ‘heart of flesh.’ It is the evidence of conversion, in fact, its inseparable consequence, for the true Christian repents or mourns over his sins when no eye save God’s can see him, and he labours to attain that inward holiness and purity which David spoke of when he said, ‘Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts.’ (Ps. li. 6.) Those who repent unto life forsake all sin ; not the outward acts of evil, which would bring upon them the reproach of others, but the secret sins, the sins of the heart,—evil thoughts, unholy passions and corrupt desires, which are naked and open to the all-seeing God, but concealed from our fellow-men.”

“Ah, sir,” said Hyford, “there you touch me hard. I understand all this now ; but for a long time I could not

comprehend it; you were always insisting upon the necessity of inward holiness, but I had no idea of what you meant until I read David's prayer, 'Cleanse thou me from secret faults.' (Ps. xix. 12.) Well, I thought, this holy man first cries out, 'Who can understand his errors?' as if they were too numerous for him to know them all, and then prays for his secret faults to be cleansed, which must be the heart sins, for in the next verse, I recollect, he says, 'Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins; let them not have the dominion over me,' by which I conclude he means those outward sins of swearing, drunkenness, passion, murder, and such like, which all Christians would naturally guard against. But it is the heart sins, dear sir, the evil motives, the hateful passions, the bad thoughts, that are so troublesome, and cost us many a sigh. How would you say true repentance is produced?"

"By looking unto Jesus," replied Mr. C——; "he turns to us in the first place, even as he did to Peter: it was his look that broke the cowardly apostle's heart, and convinced him of his sin; and then his extent of guilt showed itself in its true light, and deeply he repented of what he had done. This explains the meaning, that God had 'granted unto the Gentiles repentance unto life.' God had graciously visited them by his Spirit, convinced them they were sinners, made them deeply to bewail their iniquities, and enabled them to wage war against sin, as being the abominable thing that he hateth, and in which they would no longer take any pleasure. We must now proceed, in order to follow the further labours of those first ministers of the Gospel. The death of Stephen had filled the enemies of the new religion with joy. They thought the loss of so great a champion would materially weaken the cause, and such severity strike terror into those who were inclined to become converts. They therefore commenced a severe persecution against the believers, and caused very many to leave their homes, and travel into distant lands. There they declared the word of life, and a great number believed, and turned to the Lord. Thus the very means employed by those men greatly contributed to the furtherance of the sacred cause, and proved again the truth of God's word, when he says, 'I will work, and who shall let' or hinder it? Oh! that poor, weak, silly man would be wise, and learn to know his true position; that he would humble himself before his great Creator, and understand that he is just nothing, and that all his plans and arrange-

ments, viewed by himself with so much complacency, are only permitted by him who sees the end from the beginning, and is making every act of human policy subservient to his will, and tend to the furtherance of his glory!"

"Why did those Missionaries, for so I truly call them, preach the Gospel to the Jews only, Mr. C——?" inquired Mrs. Basil.

"Because they had not heard of Peter's visit to Cornelius, I conclude," replied Mr. C——; "and therefore yet retained their Jewish prejudices. But it is recorded that they spake unto the Grecians, that is, the Grecian or Hellenist Jews who dwelt in Antioch and the adjacent country. The main body of the apostles still continued at Jerusalem, whence they watched over the various churches now established in divers parts. The successful preaching of the Gospel at Antioch determined them to send one of their own party to assist in the work, and for this purpose Barnabas was selected, of whom this honourable testimony is recorded, 'That he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith,' (verse 24:) he was also a Hellenist, being a man of Cyprus, (Acts iv. 36;) and therefore a proper person to undertake the appointed task. Finding so many Gentiles in Antioch equally desirous with the Jews of being instructed in the faith of Christ, he set off to Tarsus to seek for Saul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles, and with whom he laboured with unwearied diligence for a whole year, proclaiming to many the glad tidings of salvation through a crucified Redeemer. In this city the title of 'Christians' was first given to the disciples, who before this time used to be called 'brethren,' 'saints,' 'the faithful,' or 'the believers:' but the Jews, as a term of reproach, styled them Nazarenes or Galileans."

"Do you think it was given to them as a term of reproach?" asked Mr. Basil.

"I do," replied Mr. C——, "and my reason is, because St. Peter in his first Epistle, iv. 16, says, 'Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.' But how little does it matter by what title the world knows us! if our names are written in the Lamb's book of life, it signifies nothing whether we are amongst the despised or the honourable of the earth. The day is fast approaching when all human distinctions shall cease, and when those only will be envied who have the name of the living God written

on their foreheads. Oh ! may we all receive this glorious mark, and then it is of no importance by what title we are known here : the Redeemer will be our judge, and we shall hear him say, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' (Matt. xxv. 34.) The subject of our chapter in the last few verses," proceeded Mr. C——, "changes, and relates in few words a prophecy of Agabus, relative to a fearful famine that should take place throughout Judea and other countries, and which, the sacred historian adds, 'took place in the days of Claudius Cæsar ;' about two years after the period we are considering."

"The Bible says but little about it, sir, I know," remarked Mr. Smith ; "but was it very bad ?"

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "bad enough to become matter of history, which continually supplies the spaces left in the divine story, where the Holy Spirit only reveals or details as much as is necessary for the furtherance of his own glory, and the instruction of his people."

"Please to tell us something of this famine, sir," said Hyford, "for I am always curious respecting such things, and I dare say you know all about it, for you have a fine memory, well stocked with book-learning."

"Well, then," said Mr. C——, "I will tell you all I know, which I have gathered from various writers. History records four famines that occurred in the days of Claudius Cæsar, but this particular one, which took place in the second year of his reign, is the one foretold by Agabus. When it arrived, relief was bestowed upon the Christians and Jews at large from a quarter least expected. Helena, queen of Adiabene, being converted, as well as King Izates, her son, to the Jewish faith, persuaded him to allow her to travel to Jerusalem in order to worship God in his Temple, and offer thanksgivings and praises for her being brought from the dark ignorance of heathenism into the knowledge of the Lord Jehovah. When she arrived, she found the people suffering from a dreadful famine, and many had already died from want of food. She therefore sent her servants into Egypt well supplied with money, ordering them to buy large quantities of corn, and then to go to the island of Cyprus for figs. Izates also, when he was informed of the calamity, furnished a most liberal supply of money for the purchase of necessities : thus God watched over his people, and in his judgment graciously remembered his chosen ones, and

rendered them assistance. Helena did not long survive her favourite son Izates, and at her own request was buried at Jerusalem, at the three Pyramids she had erected, and which were about a mile from the city."

"Thank you, sir," said Hyford; "you know I like to get to the very bottom of a thing, and you are very kind in humouring the fancy of an old man."

"I am ever ready to assist you when I can," replied Mr. C——, "and I particularly delight in uniting history and the Bible together, making the one a kind of explanation of the other. The prophecy of Agabus called forth also amongst the disciples the kindest feelings of holy fellowship, and before the time of trial came, they determined to provide for the poor saints scattered throughout the land, that thus to the best of their ability they might prevent their suffering from the fearful visitation. Thus it is that God causes evils to advance his glory; for when we act with the unselfish liberality recorded of the Christians at Antioch, we encourage the drooping graces of our weak brethren, and prove that the love of God indeed dwells in us of a truth; thus you see, Mrs. Walton," added Mr. C——, "that good works are the inseparable fruits of genuine faith. True Christians sympathise with their brethren, and prove it by deeds of active kindness. They do not say to the poor destitute outcast, 'Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled,' and yet give nothing to him that he may be relieved, (see James ii. 15—17.) No, quite the contrary, they imitate the example of their Saviour, who never wearied in acts of kindness, love and benevolence to all who crossed his path."

"How different would the state of the world be if all were true Christians!" exclaimed Hyford.

"Yes," replied Mr. C——; "it is the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit that alone can change the tempers and dispositions of man. When that glorious time arrives, that all the 'kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ,' the people may truly be compared to one large family bound together in the bonds of love, and striving to outvie each other in affection and kindness, such as we, in this state of sinfulness and corruption, can hardly realize in our minds."

"How wonderful are the effects of God's Spirit!" said Mr. Lawrence; "they are the same everywhere, whether

the happy subject is an enlightened denizen of Britain, a native African, or an inhabitant of the utmost nation of the earth. A letter I lately received from a friend engaged in the New Zealand Mission proves the truth of this remark."

Hyford began to fidget ; he longed to hear that letter, but for once in his life felt rather at a loss how to ask for it. Mr. C—— saw his anxiety, and, greatly amused, hastened to relieve him by requesting Mr. Lawrence to read a portion of it, with which he complied, saying,

"I would not intrude upon your allotted time, Mr.C——, were I not aware that it is just expired, and I thought the anecdote it records worthy of attention. My friend writes,—'I am thankful to report well of the district in which I am labouring. There is a steadiness of attendance on our services, which gives hope ; but God's Spirit alone can effect what we wish. On the Lord's day, after I began this letter, I was returning to the village, and suddenly came upon a very feeble old man, sitting alone on his mat, naked, in the sun. "Why have you not been to church?" said I. "How can I," he replied, "who cannot walk two steps?" "Well," I said, "I hope you pray by yourself." "Yes," he answered. "Repeat your prayer ;" and immediately he began:—"Have mercy upon me ! have mercy upon me ! Place me upon the mountain's peak ! place me upon the rock ! place me upon the height where my view may be clear ! Christ is thy Son : he died to save me." Such was the old man's prayer. I do not recollect ever seeing him before, but upon inquiry, I found that prayer is his constant practice, and that others have heard him, even when passing by the house, similarly engaged."

"Oh, sir," said Hyford, "how wonderful is this ! truly it proves the power of God's Holy Spirit."

"Yes," answered Mr. C—— ; "and that 'he is no respecter of persons, but that in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.' Oh ! may we too pray with our New Zealand brother to be placed upon the mountain's peak, upon the rock, even Christ Jesus our living rock, through whom alone we can gain a clear view of that glorious 'city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God,' (Heb.xi. 10 ;) 'behold the King in his beauty,' (Isa. xxxiii. 17 ;) and 'enter into that rest that remaineth for the people of God.' Surely we in this happy land, the land of Bibles and

Gospel privileges, should pray more earnestly than ever, for the outpouring of the Spirit from on high, that while, on the one hand, faithful labourers may be found, who shall rightly divide the word of truth, on the other, believers may be added to the church, multitudes both of men and women ; and that true vital godliness may be extended far and wide, while nominal profession and empty services may for ever be destroyed."

So saying Mr. C—— closed his book, and bowing to his auditory, retired into his library."

THE END.

No. 49. N. T.]

TRACTS

ON THE

NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES

BY MRS. BEST,

AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

Peter in Prison.



LONDON :
HOULSTON AND STONEMAN,
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1851.

THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

THE usual party assembled at Mr. C——'s; for the interest he excited was unwearying, and the mighty truths he taught found a response in the hearts of his hearers, who felt the privilege of attending his instructions, so truly in unison with God's holy word, and consequently demanding sincere attention. Many at first were prejudiced in favour of their own opinions, with which, through the natural pride and self-sufficiency so deeply rooted in the human heart, they were unwilling to part; but as they listened more and more to the instructions of their pastor, they found that, as poor fallen creatures, they had no right to bend the Scriptures to their own apprehensions and wishes, but on the contrary, they must, as little children, receive the "sincere milk of the word, that they might grow thereby;" in other words, they longed to improve in the knowledge of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, and were ready to bring every thought into obedience to his Word, assured from experience that they were ignorant, and that, if they fancied "they knew anything, they knew nothing yet as they ought to know." (1 Cor. viii. 2.)

This true spirit of humility Mr. C—— encouraged: though thirty years had barely passed over him, he was a deeply experienced Christian; instructed by the Lord the Spirit, he had seen and felt the hateful character of sin, and his constant intercourse with others, united with great observation of character, had taught him as experimentally the depth of sin that lurks within us, as if he had lived twice the period. It is not age that makes us practically wise: this is an aphorism which experience confirms; for while many act like fools at fifty, others are wise and prudent advisers at twenty. No, let us not look to secondary

causes, and imagine that all the difference is owing to education, habits, and so forth ; it is not so : it is the grace of God which causes persons to differ, which imparts a steadiness of conduct and fixedness of principle that astonishes the worldling, but which can be traced to those gracious influences from above, which impart wisdom and knowledge to their happy recipients. Oh that people would give honour where honour is due ! Man, with all his boasted talents, is nothing in and from himself ; he has nothing but what he has received, then “ why should he glory as though he had not received it ? ” Yet so it is ; and thus God, the great beneficent Giver, is defrauded of the praise due to himself alone, and his infatuated creature is induced to say, By my power and my might I have accomplished this and that ; forgetful that the next hour might reduce him, like Nebuchadnezzar, to a level with the brutes, or make him, like Herod the Great, a prey to a loathsome disease.

But we are forgetting : the dining-room at M—— Court is full almost to overflowing ; the old butler has found seats for the last party with difficulty ; and now his beloved master has entered and placed his little book upon the table, a signal that the interesting lecture is going to begin. Opening the volume slowly, Mr. C—— remarked,

“ The history of the Church of Christ is intensely interesting ; we have seen how the pure doctrines taught by himself and his apostles were despised ; they were too pure for the heathen world, and as they laid deep stress upon the profession and character being in unison, they roused all the vile passions of man, and determined the rulers, both Jews and Romans, to put down the new religion by every means in their power. Stephen was the first to submit to the hand of the murderer, and our chapter of to-day contains an account of the cruelties practised against two of the apostles, James and Peter ; the first part runs thus : ‘ Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) ’ (Acts xii. 1—3.) The Herod here mentioned was Herod Agrippa the First, who was grandson to the Herod who murdered the infants of Bethlehem, and who was so disturbed at the visit of the wise men of the East in search of the promised Messiah.”

“And was that the Herod who mocked him, sir?” demanded Mr. Hill.

“No,” replied Mr. C——. “Herod, surnamed the Great, who massacred the children, died in agonies soon after that event, leaving three sons, namely, Archelaus, Herod Antipas, (who was the person you inquire about, Mr. Hill,) and Philip. It is the grandson of this Herod we have now to do with; and verily it may be said of him as of the kings of Judah of old, that ‘he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done.’ The Roman emperor made him king of Judea, which was at this time a province belonging to that vast empire; and in order to gain the favour of the Jews and heads of the people, ‘he stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.’”

“What do you mean by vexing the church, Mr. C——?” inquired Mrs. Basil.

“Imprisoning them, fining them, annoying them in various ways,” replied Mr. C——; “in short, taking the advantage his rank and influence afforded to harass them by every means in his power; an example which, alas! many an unworthy and ungodly governor has since imitated. Finding that all these miserable efforts to crush the pure religion of Jesus failed, he proceeded to acts of violence, and seizing upon James, the son of Zebedee, and brother of John, he ordered him to be beheaded, and thus he became the first of the apostles who died for his loved Master’s sake. Do you recollect,” added Mr. C——, turning to the farmers, who always sat together, “our Lord foretelling this?”

“Not exactly, sir,” said Hyford.

“If you turn to Matthew xx. 20—23,” replied Mr. C——, “you will find the ambitious suit preferred by those disciples through their mother, who said to him, ‘Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom;’ imagining that he, as the Messiah, was come to restore the kingdom of Israel, and bring back the days of David and Solomon. Alas! they knew not what they asked; instead of receiving titles and governments they were to partake of the sorrows and insults their Lord would endure, and finally be baptized with blood, that is, be called upon to seal the truth with their blood, and at length receive the martyr’s crown. The death of James prepared the way for further cruelty, and Peter was next selected as

the victim of ungodly hatred. But his hour was not yet come ; his Master had much work for him to do, and not all the rage of the Jews or the malice of Herod could injure him. Let us examine the causes that *appeared* to produce this effect. I say *appeared*, because, while certain events occurred which ended in his deliverance, the whole was under the immediate guidance of an overruling Providence.

"First observe, that it is said, 'Then were the days of unleavened bread.' (Verse 3.) Herod was a downright hypocrite : in order to ingratiate himself with the Jews, he pretended great reverence for the law of Moses, and consequently would not pollute the holy feast of the Passover with the blood of a man. But while he thus pretended reverence to the divine ordinance, he rejoiced in the opportunity the delay afforded him of annoying Peter by a longer and more vexatious imprisonment. How little he knew the effects produced by the Spirit on the heart of man ! Peter was perfectly free from anxiety : he could sleep soundly although guarded by four quaternions, or sixteen soldiers, who were appointed, four at a time, to watch him night and day. He knew that when the feast was over, he was to be brought forth to the people, but this did not move him, for life was only of value in his eyes as long as it was employed in his loved Master's cause. When that was over, he was ready to 'put off his tabernacle,' and hail the path, though it might be marked with suffering, that would convey him into the unclouded presence of the Saviour he adored."

"Why is the word Easter used in the 4th verse, Mr. C—— ?" inquired Mr. Basil ; "it had not at this time been adopted by the Christian Church."

"No," replied Mr. C——, "it is to be regretted that our translators used the word, instead of saying the Passover, which would have been far more preferable. Excepting in this place, we do not find the word in the Bible, and which, in the days of our Saxon ancestors, referred to the worship of one of their idols."

"Perhaps you will tell us all about it, sir," said Hyford. "Idols ! did our forefathers worship idols ?"

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "like the rest of the nations of the earth, this now highly-favoured country was defiled by idolatry ; and every day in the week was dedicated to some miserable idol. But in the month of April, the same wherein the Jewish Passover was held, our ances-

tors used to offer sacrifices to a stone goddess that they called Eostre. And in time, when the Gospel was preached, and the glad tidings it brought of a Saviour induced the people to cast away their senseless objects of worship, strange to say, *Eostre* was changed into the word Easter, and ever since became the name whereby we celebrate the glorious festival of the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

"And so this is the origin of the word Easter," said Hyford musingly. "What a fine thing book-learning is!" Mr. C—— smiled, but said nothing to the whimsical old man.

"The position of Peter," resumed the pastor, "was anything but comfortable; chained to two soldiers he passed the tedious hours of the night as well as day, so fearful was the tyrant lest he should escape him. Deliverance, however, was at hand. The next day he was to be brought forth to the people in order to be executed, but, 'behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.' (Verses 7—9.)

"You have often heard this proverb," remarked Mr. C——, "'Man's extremity is God's opportunity,' and his believing people are finding it daily verified. Thus it was with Peter; the next day was to have been his last—so Herod intended; but how easily did Jehovah frustrate it! A deep sleep sealed up the faculties of the guard, while his angel performed his commands, and released his faithful servant. Thus another beautiful example is left upon record for our comfort, of the never-failing providence and care of our heavenly Father. 'He shall give his angels charge over thee to keep thee,' says David; and St. Paul tells us, 'they are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.' (Heb. i. 14.) Well might Peter wonder, and imagine that all was a dream, or vision; but when the iron gate flew open, and the watchmen, like the guard, were unconscious of their movements, and allowed them to pass, the reality flashed upon his mind; and upon the departure of

his celestial guide he exclaimed, 'Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.' (Verse 11.) The next thing was to consider what he had better do, and whither go.

"At length he fixed upon the abode of Mary, the mother of Mark, and sister of Barnabas. There 'many were gathered together praying,' that the Lord Jesus, the great Head of the Church, would look upon, and restore unto them their beloved friend and teacher. And while they were thus employed, behold, the answer came; for Peter was standing, and knocking at the door. 'And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.' (Verses 12—16.) The whole of this history, so simply related, is a beautiful exemplification of the watchfulness of God over his people, and the encouragement they meet with to continue instant in prayer. This, my friends, is the great medium of communication between the Creator and his creature man. And lest, through a sense of our own unworthiness, or from humility, we should be backward in making use of such a privilege, the Scriptures abound with commands for us to 'pray without ceasing,' and with examples to prove that we address a prayer-hearing God. He knows the wants of his people before they ask him, for the very petitions they prefer are inspired by himself."

"Please to explain that, sir," said Hyford, interrupting Mr. C—— impatiently.

"I will endeavour to do so," replied he, kindly, knowing the motive that induced the impetuous old man so to act. "Prayer is the great duty and privilege of the redeemed: no sooner is a person led by the Spirit of God to feel himself a sinner, than by the influences of the same Spirit he cries for pardon and guidance. This was the case, as we have seen, with Saul. Struck to the earth by the appearance of Jesus, who stopped him on his cruel mission to Damascus, he exclaimed, 'Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?' (Acts ix.) And so it is always: when the Lord the Spirit enters into the heart, he imparts

those desires after holiness and spiritual instruction which he alone can give : he inspires the prayer he intends to answer ; for it is written, 'The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities : for we know not what we should pray for as we ought.' (Rom. viii. 26.) And what I have said of spiritual things also applies to temporal blessings. We may pray for those also ; for we are commanded to 'pour out our hearts,' and 'cast our burden upon the Lord,' and he has promised to give us what he knows will be best for ourselves, and conducive to his own glory. He intended to employ Peter still longer, and it was his purpose to deliver him from the malice of the Jews and Herod ; but it added to the strengthening of the faith of the believers, that at the time they were employed praying for his release, they should experience the pleasure of again seeing him, and proving the goodness and faithfulness of their covenant God.

"Were you carefully to mark the events of every day, you would be astonished at the proofs they produce of the unwearied love of the Lord Jehovah. You pray daily, earnestly,—for I address myself to my dear Christian friends,—that you may be upheld in the hour of temptation, that you may be preserved from dangers both temporal and spiritual, that various blessings may be bestowed upon you : and have you asked for these things in vain ? Oh, no ! You have beheld with hearts overflowing with gratitude the wonderful way whereby you have been led all the days of your pilgrimage, and how you have been restrained, yes, often, by a gentle yet irresistible power, from saying and doing things totally at variance with your high and holy calling, the commission of which would afterwards have caused bitter sorrow. And why was this ? Because the Lord the Spirit led you to feel your utter helplessness ; he caused you to cry to him for grace to uphold you in time of need ; and he fulfilled his promise of giving you assistance, and enabling you to stand firm. Thus the Spirit of Jesus acts amongst the redeemed : it is his covenant office to lead them onwards ; given by the Father, to be redeemed by the Son, they are sanctified by the Spirit, and a sweet communion is maintained between them during the whole of their pilgrimage, causing them to glory even in trials and difficulties, as at such seasons they are oftentimes favoured with greater manifestations of the Divine presence."

"I believe that, Mr. C——," said Mr. Lawrence : "it

is when earthly comforts fail, and our blessings are removed, that we seek more diligently our heavenly Comforter ; and truly he never leaves us nor forsakes us, but seems always ready to draw nigh to us when we ask him, and more than compensates for the withdrawal of temporal favours. The history you are speaking of is a great encouragement to us to 'pray without ceasing.' "

" Yes," replied Mr. C——, " the effect of Peter's unexpected appearance was almost paralysing ; for while the believers were imploring the Lord to deliver him, they were not prepared for so speedy a reply, and could scarcely imagine its reality ; but when the joy they felt had somewhat subsided, he related how miraculously he had been restored to them, and after commanding them to inform James the son of Alphæus, and the rest of the brethren, he withdrew into some place of concealment, until the rage of his enemies had blown over."

" And how did the king take it, sir?" said Hyford. " I suspect he was in a great rage."

" Surely he was," replied Mr. C——; " he was not a man to take such a disappointment as this with calmness. The soldiers were to be pitied, for they were not in fault, but he imagined that the escape of their prisoner was owing to their neglect, and therefore, like a true tyrant, he gave orders they should be put to death ; for the ancient law was, that every soldier was accountable for his prisoner, and if he allowed him to escape, must forfeit his own life. After these events, Herod left Jerusalem, and went down to Cesarea, where he abode ; but the object of his journey was to exhibit some public games in honour of Claudius Cæsar, and which were attended by many persons of rank and distinction. The inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon had deeply offended Herod, and he intended visiting them with some severe punishment ; but as they received all their corn and necessary supplies from Judea, it was incumbent upon them to seek to regain his favour, which they did through the friendly offices of Blastus, the king's chamberlain.

" Fond of show and splendour, this vain prince determined upon receiving the deputation from the offending cities with the utmost magnificence ; and upon a set day, which was the second of the festival, he sat upon his throne, arrayed in royal apparel, consisting of a robe richly wrought with silver, which reflected the rays of the

sun, and shone with such dazzling brilliancy that the people were struck with admiration, and uttering a shout, cried out at the end of the speech he made to them, 'It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.' Alas! for poor human nature; no sooner had the words been uttered than 'the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.' (Verse 23.) Such is the account given in the Scriptures of the Divine vengeance upon this guilty prince: the Jewish historian Josephus, whom I have often quoted, mentions also this awful event, informing us that he was seized with agonizing pain in his heart and stomach, insomuch that he felt his days were numbered, and said to those who had so basely flattered him, 'Lo, he whom ye esteem for a god is doomed to die—for I who have been adored by you as one immortal, am now under the hands of death.' For five days his misery continued; his body putrefied while he was yet alive, and at last he expired, in the fifty-fourth year of his age, and the seventh of his reign. What a lesson is left on record here," added Mr. C——, "for mankind! We talk of statesmen and orators, and persons of talent and abilities, as if it was by their own industry and exertion they had attained such superiority over others;—but is it so? Oh no! these things are the gifts of God, talents committed to their trust, for the use of which they will have to give a strict account, and if they are abused or employed otherwise than to their Master's glory, an awful punishment will be the consequence."

"How little this is thought of, sir!" said Hyford.

"Indeed it is," replied Mr. C——, mournfully, "but it is not the less true. We are told by our Lord himself, 'that to whom much is given, of him will much be required;' and I often tremble at the thought of the responsibility we are under, and feel deeply humbled for the imperfect manner in which we employ those talents wherewith we have been favoured. Instead therefore of taking any credit to ourselves, let us never forget that all we have is the gift of God in Christ Jesus, that we have nothing but what we have received, and consequently we should not glory as though we possessed it naturally."

"Well, sir," said Hyford, "I do not think this is your ease."

"I endeavour to strive against such a feeling," replied

Mr. C——, “but pride is so deeply rooted in the heart, and assumes such a variety of forms, that it can only be checked and resisted by the gracious assistance of the Spirit from on high: I firmly believe that flattery is sweet to every one more or less, and we had much rather say,—It is by my power, and my might, and my industry, I have attained my comforts, and my fame, and my greatness, and my wealth,—than by acknowledging the bounteous hand of the great and real Giver. Alas! few possess the honesty of that good man, now in glory, who, when told of the eloquence and beauty of a discourse he had just delivered, coldly replied, ‘Yes, the devil told me that an hour ago!’ and thus it is he mars and corrupts our best actions, instilling his poison into our susceptible hearts, which are ever ready to receive it, and compelling the child of God to cry out, disgusted with himself, and the load of inbred sin that overwhelms him, ‘Oh wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?’—‘for the good which I would, I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do.’ May we, my dear friends, take warning from the fearful judgment that fell on the self-righteous, vain-glorious Herod, and which has been recorded for our instruction.

“The God with whom we have to deal is a great and mighty Being, who declares he will not give his glory to another, (Isa. xlii. 8;) and who uses means continually to bring down the haughtiness of man, that himself alone may be exalted. For it is written, ‘The day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low.’ (Isa. ii. 12.) As long as Job exalted himself, and tried to defend his past life, and was ‘righteous in his own eyes,’ (Job xxxii. 1,) the Lord contended with him, and from the daily occurrences of life proved to him that he knew nothing, for that he ‘darkened counsel by words without knowledge.’ And what was the result of the contest? That Job exclaimed in the deepest self-abasement, ‘I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.’ (Job xlii. 5, 6.)

“One word more,” added Mr. C——, “before we part. While we endeavour to banish all self-righteousness out of our own hearts, let us beware that we do not encourage it in others. As I said before, few can endure flattery; and

if we use it, we spread a net for the feet of our neighbour, (Prov. xxix. 5,) that will be highly displeasing to our heavenly Father. May we continually bear in mind our Redeemer's words, 'Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted;' and then, while we act with all due humility and lowliness of mind, we shall strive to maintain a conscience void of offence both towards God and our fellow-creatures."

THE END.

No. 50. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,

AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

Elmas the Sorcerer.



LONDON:
HOULSTON AND STONEMAN,
65, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1851.

THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

"SINCE we met last week, my dear friends," said Mr. C——, when his people were assembled at M—— Court, waiting for him to deliver his appointed weekly lecture or instruction, "I have had many missionary papers sent me by a fellow-labourer and brother in the ministry. The perusal of these records rejoices the heart of all who love the Saviour, and the souls of their fellow-creatures; for, being fully convinced as we are, that there is 'salvation in none other, and that there is none other name under heaven given amongst men whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ,' we must long for him to be made more generally known, and 'that all the ends of the world may see the salvation of our God.' And what is this great and glorious work now carrying on throughout the world, but a continuation of the labours of the apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ himself? 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,' was his very last command; 'and lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world,' was the accompanying promise. Surely the event proves it; the histories of the missions established in the dark places of the earth declare his faithfulness; for unless he accompanies the word by his Spirit all earthly efforts are vain: he employs men as his instruments, because, generally, he chooses in his wisdom and condescension to work by means; but if he withholds the blessing of his grace, all that we can do is nought. The conversion of a Saul is the work of God the Holy Spirit alone; and he must bless the seed sown in the human heart as much as he does *that* planted in the natural ground; for we all know that if the rain and sunshine are withheld, our toil is in vain, and

that while we plant, we must look to God alone for the fruit."

"That is very true, sir," said Hyford; "I quite comprehend it now, and I see it also very plainly in my own case as well as in that of others. When I visit the poor-house I prove the truth of what you say; some are glad to see me, others shrink away; some ask me for more tracts, others tell me they cannot understand them, which I believe is quite true, for they do not care to understand; and surely all this arises from the fact of the Holy Spirit blessing some more than others, according to his own good-will and pleasure."

"Thus it has ever been," remarked Mr. C——. "Salvation is freely offered to all, but only a portion accept it. The word of God grew and multiplied in the days of the Apostles, but yet the believers constituted a small proportion of the then civilized world. Happy for those who are led to know their real state, and feel that by nature they 'are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.'"

"I cannot believe we are as bad as you would make us appear, Mr. C——," said Miss Walters, a lady who had been induced by Mr. Lawrence to come to M—— Court the last two or three weeks.

"Can you not?" replied Mr. C——, gently. "My dear madam, I am not your judge, but if you read God's holy word with the earnest prayer that he would search your heart, and try it by his Spirit, you would soon be convinced that in yourself dwelleth no good thing. It is neither my duty nor my office to make people satisfied with themselves, and to cry, 'Peace, peace, where there is no peace;' never mind what you think of yourself, see what God thinks of you; and if you honestly try yourself and your past life by the test of his word, I firmly believe you will soon add your testimony to that of the whole redeemed Church of God, that 'by grace alone you are saved, through faith, and that not of yourself, it is the gift of God,' freely bestowed without the slightest claim to merit or deserving on your part. But," continued Mr. C——, looking at the time-piece, "we must begin our chapter, or our allotted hour will be passed away. Our last chapter recorded the watchfulness of God over his Apostle Peter on the one hand, and his punishment of sin and pride on the other, in the person of the miserable Herod. These various events were calculated to make

a deep impression upon the minds of all who heard them ; for though the majority of the people were idolaters, they were in general well informed in the learning of the age, and ready to listen to anything new and wonderful.

"The Jews were awfully bigoted ; imagining themselves the especial favourites of Heaven, they despised the gracious voice of warning they had heard. The Lord of Life had vouchsafed to visit them, and showed them their depth of sin, which was hastening on a fearful visitation, but they heeded it not ; they returned his kindness with contempt, and his compassion with insult and death. Alas ! for Judea, she knew not what she did ! and the never-failing mercy of her Covenant God still sent forth messengers of peace, proclaiming pardon and reconciliation through him whom they had rejected and crucified. The death of Herod was favourable to the increase of the number of believers ; a formidable persecutor had been wonderfully removed, and, in consequence, 'the word of God grew and multiplied.' In the city of Antioch many holy persons were assembled : they had first taken up their abode there in consequence of the persecution that arose about Stephen ; and the first verse of the 13th chapter specifies *five* by name, who are each deserving of a passing notice. Barnabas was he who is spoken of in the 4th chapter as being a 'Levite' possessing property in the island of Cyprus, and which, upon his conversion, he sold in order to assist the wants of the poorer brethren ; we frequently hear of him in the Acts, and find him spoken of as a 'good man, and full of the Holy Ghost.' Simeon, that was called Niger, is the second on the list. As 'Niger' signifies 'black,' it is supposed that he was a Negro, and had this surname because of his complexion. Lucius of Cyrene ; Manaen, brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, his foster-brother, and yet how different a man !"

"Was this the Herod that mocked the Saviour, sir?" said Hyford ; "there are so many of this name, that I confuse them."

"Perhaps so," replied Mr. C—— ; "this was the Herod, who, with his men of war, mocked Jesus, and arrayed him in the gorgeous robe, and afterwards died in Spain, whither he was banished with the infamous Herodias, who murdered John the Baptist. But what a contrast does the companion of his youth present !—he shines forth as a prophet and teacher of righteousness, like Moses of old, who esteemed the 'reproach of Christ

greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward; (Heb. xi. 26;) and willingly cast away titles and honours for the sake of his future and more glorious inheritance. Saul of Tarsus closes the list; this once fierce persecutor, now a chosen vessel for proclaiming gospel liberty to the Gentile nations, and taught not to consider 'his life dear unto himself so that he might finish his course with joy,' and be spent in the service of his dear Redeemer."

"It is a list deserving notice," observed Mr. Lawrence; "a strange assemblage!—the Levite from Cyprus, the Negro from Africa, the companion of Herod, the once destroying Saul,—truly we may exclaim, in the words of the last, 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!' (Rom. xi. 33.) There is no respect of persons with the Lord Jehovah; he has 'made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth,' (Acts xvii. 26,) and for the redemption of this great family the Saviour died. Were this mighty truth as deeply felt as it is outwardly acknowledged, surely there would be more heartfelt love experienced amongst us, and we should cease to hear of those jealousies and differences which too frequently destroy Christian love and fellowship. But pray proceed, Mr. C——."

"From amidst the number we have been considering," resumed the Pastor, "the Holy Ghost said, 'Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.' (Acts xiii. 2.) How much is implied here! for thus we see how the Lord the Spirit acts. He calls his people, sets them to their work, which he 'has before ordained they should walk in,' (see Eph. ii. 10;) he upholds and enables them to perform it, for 'he works in them both to will and to do,' and as long as they follow where he leads, and are willing to look up for wisdom and guidance, all will be well. The vineyard of the Lord Jehovah extends over the wide world, and the harvest is truly great. Let us pray that more may be separated for the great task of labouring therein, and that they may not be weary in well-doing, but that all who are called to the work may never be inclined to look back, but may press forward with diligence to perform their allotted tasks, and study to show themselves approved unto God, 'workmen that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of

truth,' and being 'thoroughly furnished unto all good works.' This was the character of Saul and Barnabas; and no sooner did they receive their command than they hastened to obey, accompanied by the prayers and blessings of those they left behind. Following the guidance of the Spirit, they first went to Seleucia, a sea-port town, about fifteen miles from Antioch, and from thence they sailed to Cyprus, the native country of Barnabas. At Salamis they preached boldly in the Jewish synagogues, and at length arrived at a city called Paphos. The island of Cyprus was awfully renowned for its heathen abominations; Salamis and Paphos were its two chief cities, and while the former boasted of its temple to Jupiter, the latter had another dedicated to Venus. I need hardly tell you that these were two of the principal deities worshipped by the Gentile nations, and that they were held in high veneration by the Romans and various other nations for many centuries. Idolatry began directly after the confusion of tongues took place at Babel. By that fearful visitation the knowledge of the one living and true God was retained only by a few individuals, and the wider the various parties dispersed the sooner they lost what trifling remembrance they once possessed respecting him. Nor is the case far different now: where the Bible is unknown idolatry still prevails, and you who live in this happy country can form but a small idea of the miserable state of those nations who know not the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, value your privileges! Let them never be taken from you, for it is the Bible alone that can give you peace and happiness, and it is the free circulation of the Bible that renders England the first and greatest of the nations of the world. Take away the Bible, and her glory is gone,—all the wealth that pours into her bosom from her own rich mines, and from foreign lands, sinks into dross before this precious book; for the cities shall fall, and the mountains crumble away, but the word of God shall endure for ever, and 'this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you.' Guard, therefore, your treasure, and beware of those who would teach you differently. There are some who will tell you you cannot understand it, that it is too deep for you, that you have no right to read it for yourselves: my dear friends, avoid those men, for they are seducers, deceiving unwary souls, and deceived themselves. It is foretold that in the last days such should abound, and truly we need to be now on

our guard, and to pray earnestly that we may be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, and never left to ourselves, no, not for a moment. In this way only shall we be able to proceed steadily in our onward course; for our 'own strength is perfect weakness,' and our great adversary, the devil, never slumbers nor loses sight of his prey, but is ready to take advantage of all our infirmities. In the days of the Apostles he found a ready assistant in the person of Bar-jesus, or, as he is more generally called, Elymas the Sorcerer."

"How was that, sir?" said Hyford, whose curiosity was raised.

"You remember," replied Mr. C——, "that Barnabas and Saul arrived at Paphos, the city that was hatefully notorious for its wickedness and worship of the image of Venus; there the governor of the island dwelt, and strange to say, as soon as he heard of the arrival of the Apostles he desired to hear the word of God. This roused the jealousy and anger of the magician or sorcerer Bar-jesus, a Jew who dwelt there, and who gained his living by his impositions on the multitude. He therefore sought to turn away the deputy, Sergius Paulus, from the faith, and to persuade him not to listen to instructions that would destroy his craft. 'Then Saul, (who is also called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?' (Verses 9, 10.) Under the influence of the Holy Spirit the Apostle stood forth, and before the multitude declared the character of the man that tried to pervert the right ways of the Lord; and what St. Paul then said of him is fearfully true of all those who act like him. He describes him as the child of the devil, full of subtilty or cunning, bent upon mischief, determined to oppose the way of righteousness, an adversary of heaven, the enemy of God. What a fearful character! And does he stand alone? Alas! no; the world abounds with similar characters, men and women who will not go to heaven themselves, or permit those who are willing to do so to enter in. It is fearful to ponder upon the various means employed by such persons to pervert the way of righteousness, and with what fearful diligence they labour to turn away others from the faith. Let us only point to the wicked infidel books continually published in London, and which are sent down into the coun-

try, distilling their fearful poison into the souls of the ignorant and unsuspecting multitude. What have the authors of those books to answer for, when they have been the instruments of destroying the souls of men! What will they say in that day when they must stand before the Judge of the world, and be accused, even by those miserable beings they have deceived? What excuse will the present Pope of Rome make then, for preventing the dissemination of the Bible, that book which alone can make us wise unto salvation, which proclaims the glad tidings of a Saviour to the exclusion of human merits and deservings, and therefore teaches, that man, with all his selfish pride and boasting, is nothing accounted of in the eyes of the Most High?"

"And has the Pope forbidden the reading of the Bible, sir?" said Hyford.

"He has," replied Mr. C——; "and woe be to his hoary head for so doing. He knew well, like Elymas, that if he permitted his people to read the word of God, the priestcraft and mummeries of his religion would be in danger, so he has issued an order that none of his subjects in Rome are to retain a Bible, and whoever is found teaching heretical doctrine, as they term it, that is, contrary to the Church of Rome, is to be sent to work in the galleys for three years."

"The galleys, sir, what do you mean?" interrupted Hyford.

"The galley," replied his kind teacher, "is a vessel that is worked by oars and sails: there are sometimes as many as fifty-two rowers employed. These men are generally composed either of convicts or prisoners of war, and with chains to their feet, are compelled to hard labour: their condition is horrible, and the misery, filth, and vice wherein they drag on their miserable existence is deplorable to think upon. To be a galley-slave comprehends every deprivation and misery that man can endure."

"And so the Pope threatens his people with a trip to the galleys if they try to teach the way to heaven to their fellow-creatures; verily," added the old man with a most expressive shrug of the shoulders, "methinks he is another Elymas."

"How?" said Mr. Lawrence; "how can the Pope be like Elymas?"

"Oh, sir," said Hyford, "I am sure you see the likeness as plainly as I do: did not Elymas wish to prevent

the governor of the country from hearing God's word, for fear his craft should be in danger, and does not the Pope the same, or else why should he prevent his people from reading the Bible? Yes, it is plain to old John Hyford, and I hope to all the people of England, that the old man the Pope is frightened; he sees the folks here will have nothing to say to him, because they read the Bible which teaches them better, therefore is determined this shall not be the case at home, so he keeps the word of God away from them, under pain of severe punishment, and thus shows himself the enemy of all righteousness, and as such the child of the devil."

"Well," said Mr. Lawrence, "the Pope has not much cause to thank you for your good opinion of him, but I believe you are pretty near the truth."

"His actions prove it, sir," said Hyford respectfully. "I only judge from them: if a man or woman talk like an angel, I care nothing for them if their lives and conduct are opposite."

"The consistency of our gracious Redeemer's life was one of the most lovely traits in his character," replied Mr. C—, "and demands our notice and imitation. There is no use in calling him 'Lord, Lord,' and not doing the works which he says; neither can we expect his blessing, if in our *lives* and *actions* we deny him. The judgment that descended upon the miserable sorcerer, proved the divine displeasure, and that the judgment passed upon him by the apostle was under the influence and direction of the God who knows the inmost thoughts and secrets of the heart. For turning to the culprit he exclaimed, 'And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.' (Verse 11.) Here was a fearful proof of the extent of his crime, and the helpless state to which he was reduced, which at once convinced the governor and his people of the divine mission of the apostles, and caused them to believe with trembling. The mission in Cyprus being fulfilled, Paul and Barnabas departed thence, and travelled to another Antioch, which was situated in Asia Minor, a considerable distance from the town of the same name in Syria, from whence they first started. What they did or taught during that long journey is not recorded, for it is observable," added Mr.

C——, “ that the history of the Apostles, like that of their divine Master, is not closely detailed, but the Holy Spirit has left as much upon record as is necessary for our instruction and the manifestation of his purposes of love towards a sinful world. When Paul and his companions arrived in Antioch, ‘ They went into the synagogue on the sabbath-day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.’ (Verse 15.) Although strangers, the circumstance of their sitting down when they went into the synagogue, which you know is the Jewish place of worship, proved that they were preachers: I mention this, in order to explain to you their being invited to address the people when the appointed service was finished. The invitation so courteously given was immediately accepted by the apostle Paul, who stood up, and beckoning with his hand in order to command the more attention, said, ‘ Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.’ (Verse 16.) Observe here, he addresses two sets of hearers, the men of Israel, that is, the Jews, the descendants of Abraham, and, ‘ ye that fear God,’ whereby he meant some Gentiles and religious proselytes who were also present (see verses 42 and 43). In order to fix their attention he relates the history of God’s dealings with Israel; how, in the first instance, he had chosen them from out of the other nations of the world, that he might manifest in them his unwearying love and his mighty power, and how the Lord his God did bear him, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that they went, until he brought them into the promised land of Canaan. He then proceeded to notice the manner whereby they had been governed, first, by judges, and afterwards by kings: but of these he only mentions two by name, namely, Saul, the son of Cis, the first king of Israel, and his successor, David, of whom it is recorded, ‘ I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.’ (Verse 22. Compare 1 Sam. xiii. 14.) From David the inspired preacher passed at once to Jesus, David’s King, and David’s Son according to the flesh: this was the Saviour promised to Adam in Paradise, and continually mentioned to the patriarchs, and of whom John the Baptist said, ‘ Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.’ My dear friends, in the words of

the Apostle I would exclaim, 'Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.' (Verse 26.) Oh! how often," added Mr. C——, "shall these gracious words be repeated to you; how often shall we 'pray you to be reconciled to God!' For he hath made Jesus 'to be sin for us,'—or, in other words, accounted as the sinner, and the punishment due to sin laid upon him,—'who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.' (See 2 Cor. v. 20, 21.) Yes; no cause of death was found in him, for 'he was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners;' but he came to do his heavenly Father's will, and that will was, 'to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness.' (Dan. ix. 24.) This was his mighty mission, and gloriously he fulfilled it, in the smallest circumstance completing the prophecies, and when all was finished, laying down his life, descending into the grave, and on the third day rising triumphant from the tomb, thus proving the truth of his glorious mission, and that he is the Son of God with power. 'Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.' (Verse 38.) There is no other way to heaven and eternal life," added Mr. C——, with great earnestness, "and to you is this word of salvation sent. Oh! do not reject it; the day of mercy will soon be over, the door of salvation will ere long be closed: now is the accepted time, now the Lord waits to be gracious; it is the despisers of this salvation that shall wonder, and perish, but not one that calls upon the Lord now shall call in vain."

"Let me ask one question before we part, Mr. C——," said Mr. Martin: "What is meant by the 'sure mercies of David,' in the 34th verse?"

"You have called our attention, Mr. Martin," replied Mr. C——, "to words that would supply ample subject for a volume, instead of the trifling notice we can give to it. They are quoted from Isaiah lv. 3, and imply the same as that everlasting covenant that the Lord Jehovah promises to enter into with his people; even that system of grace and mercy which Eternal Love conceived, and fully accomplished, in the atonement offered by the Redeemer. Thus the mercies of our King, our David, become *sure* mercies; nothing can annul them, for while He graciously

undertook to fulfil the demands of the holy law which man had broken, the Father promised to pardon the repenting sinner, and for the sake of what Jesus did and suffered, to receive him again into favour, and bestow upon him everlasting life ; but while the Father and the Son are thus graciously providing for the sinner's acceptance, the Holy Spirit gently leads him on ; he convinces him of sin, and softens his rebellious heart ; thus giving the new mind, which causes him to cast himself upon the Saviour alone, and become a partaker of pardon, grace, righteousness, and strength ; all which are to be found in David's King and David's Lord. Here we must conclude for to-day.

" When next we meet, I must," said Mr. C——, " again revert to this chapter, as there is much still contained in it deeply interesting and improving."

No. 51 N. T.]

TRACTS
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Uystra.



LONDON :
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1851.

THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

"THE length of our chapter last week," remarked Mr. C——, "obliged us to defer its completion until to-day; with your permission, therefore, we will now resume our subject, and begin at the 38th verse of the 13th chapter of the Acts."

"We desired you might do so," observed Mr. Basil, "for Paul's sermon at Antioch is very beautiful, and contains much that demands our attention."

"It does," replied the Pastor; "and I like to dwell upon it: he so plainly proved the Lord Jesus Christ to be he of whom 'Moses in the law and the prophets did write;' of whom David, 'the man after God's own heart,' so sweetly sang in his Book of Psalms, and who, by his rising from the tomb, proved he was indeed that Holy One who never saw corruption, and who, consequently, was in deed and in truth that 'Saviour which should come into the world.' With St. Paul, therefore, I would proclaim to all my hearers, 'Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.' (Verses 38, 39.) Paul applied himself to his Jewish listeners, who being wrapped up in the multitudinous observances of the ceremonial law, expected to obtain eternal life by rigid attention to it; I equally address myself to those amongst you, who fancy you can work out your own salvation, and thus become your own saviours. Oh! cast away such vain notions; in the day when the secrets of all hearts shall be

revealed,—when the actions, and the *motives* that directed those actions are laid bare, then will such persons discover to their everlasting dismay, that being weighed in the balance of Infinite Justice, they are found wanting, and must reap the consequences of being treated as bad and unprofitable servants. My dear friends, in the sight of God, ye cannot be justified by any works of your own. Let us consider for a moment what justification means, and then we shall be more sensible of our own deficiencies. Justification is an act of God, whereby he pardons and accepts of sinners on account of the merits and death of Jesus, whose righteousness, by faith, becomes theirs, and for whose sake they are pardoned. The glorious proof believers have of their being justified before God, is the resurrection of their dear Redeemer ; yes, in that triumphant hour, he declared the mighty work of salvation was completed,—that he had brought in an everlasting righteousness, and that all who believe are saved from wrath through him. Supposing we could be justified by works, surely, as the Apostle says, it would not enable us to glory before God. (See Rom. iv. 2.) No, it might fill us with pride and self-righteousness in the eyes of our fellow-creatures, and they might flatter us, and declare us saints, and even canonize us ; but, alas ! what would it avail in the sight of God ? How far preferable to view ourselves as we are in reality ; by nature, ‘wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked !’ by grace, ‘washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.’ (1 Cor. vi. 11.) It is a glorious truth, that we are justified freely by grace alone, not by anything we are, or can do ; and therefore the child of God, who rests upon the finished righteousness of his Saviour, is as safely protected from harm as Noah when, shut in the ark by Jehovah himself, he heard the storm howl without, and yet was certain of his own security.”

“ I understand this, sir,” said Hyford.

“ Well, then, Master Hyford,” said Mr. Lawrence, “ tell us what you do understand, and do not keep it all to yourself.”

The old man looked at him, and smiled : “ Ah, sir,” said he, “ you like to set the talkative farmer going ; why, I cannot tell.”

“ Because,” replied Mr. Lawrence, “ I like to hear you bear your testimony to the faithfulness of our gracious God, and because you have lived long enough to speak to

the purpose : tell us, then, how you apply the great doctrine of justification to yourself."

"That I can quickly do," replied Hyford. "I have only to look back to my days of sin and folly, when I lived without hope, and without God in the world, and then contrast the time when, by the goodness of the Spirit, I was brought to know Jesus as my Saviour. As soon as I acknowledged him as my only Saviour,—as soon as I heartily renounced all dependence upon myself or anything I could do, I felt I was in the right track ; and when our dear parson, here, in one of his sermons, proved that Christ died, first, for our sins, and then rose again for our justification, I saw it all as plain as I see the nails on my fingers ; and now I feel, that, because my Saviour died, I shall live ; nay, more, because he lives, I must live too, for I am now a member of his body, a branch of the Vine, whereof he is the Parent Tree,—a sheep of the flock that he tends himself, and of which he has said not one can ever perish, neither can any man pluck it out of his hand. And all this," added the old man, who had talked so rapidly and earnestly that he was almost out of breath, "because I am justified, or counted righteous before God, for the alone sake of him who loved me, and gave himself for me. Oh, madam," added he, turning to Miss Walters, "you must understand and believe this, for then you will be happy ; and this you will never be as long as you expect to get to Heaven by your own good deeds ! Why, you might as well be a Papist at once !"

The lady looked offended, but Mr. Lawrence, quietly assuring her the honest man only spoke with his accustomed bluntness, to which all submitted, she soon recovered her equanimity ; and Mr. C—— resuming the subject, harmony was restored almost before Hyford was conscious of the error he had committed.

"You have well expressed the preciousness of being justified, Mr. Hyford, from your own experience," said he ; "and I trust many who are present will profit by it. A fearful denunciation follows for those who reject the salvation so freely offered ; and texts such as these are recorded for our own warning and instruction : 'Beware,' said the Apostle to all his hearers, many of whom still determined to cleave to the law of Moses, and obstinately reject the offer of eternal life through Jesus Christ,— 'Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is

spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.' (Verses 40, 41.) And did they listen to this warning voice? Alas, no! the Jews went out of the synagogue, not caring to hear such plain truths repeated; the consequence was, that ere long wrath came upon them to the uttermost: then, indeed, they 'wondered,' but it was too late; calamities overtook them such as were never before heard of, and they were compelled to believe at last that their 'iniquities had separated between them and their God,' and that he had indeed 'hid his face from them, and would not hear.' But his purposes of mercy towards the Gentiles were continually displayed, and he inclined them to desire a repetition of these awful truths; so deep was the effect produced, that 'the next sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.' This enraged the Jews; they would not listen themselves, neither would they permit others, and they preferred seeing those around them buried in heathen ignorance rather than they should become the servants of the living God. What a hateful thing is unregenerate human nature! No trace left of that glorious being that first dwelt in Paradise! Oh, what a pitiable wreck!—if angels could weep, how bitterly they must lament over man, as he is now, compared with what he was when he was first created! It is when we thus consider him, that we behold with wonder the power of divine grace, and the preciousness of the love that rushed forward to his rescue, and to repair the fearful damages. Yes, the regeneration of every man and woman is the work of Omnipotence alone, and as one sinner after another is redeemed by him who has led captivity captive, fresh songs of triumph are heard in the realms of light, and every new arrival echoes the glad chorus, 'Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.' (Rev. i. 5, 6.) The delight with which the Gentiles listened to the Gospel excited, as I said before, the malice and enmity of the Jews, who stirred up even devout and honourable women, with the chief men of the city, to persecute the Apostles, and drive them out of their coasts; but not until they had left ample testimony of the truth of their mission, and were the means of converting

many to the faith, 'who were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.'"

"How grievously were the women out of their place here, Mr. C——," remarked Mr. Basil.

"True," replied Mr. C——; "the power and influence of women, either for good or evil, is greater than is generally acknowledged. The Old Testament furnishes me with many proofs of the truth of what I say. Look at Rebekah; behold the deep-laid scheme she concocted, first, for the aggrandisement, and then, for the security of her beloved Jacob. The more holy and simple mind of Isaac could not enter into her plans, and he at once fell into the snare. The lofty soul of Deborah cared nothing for the armies of Sisera; in the chariot of Barak she headed the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulon, and proved herself indeed a mother in Israel, a great and powerful ruler. The more gentle Hannah was endued with the spirit of prophecy, and spoke of Jesus as the 'Anointed,' whose adversaries should be broken in pieces, and who should be exalted for ever. It was by the good understanding and well-timed eloquence of Abigail that David was turned from his purpose of shedding much innocent blood; while, on the contrary, Jezebel induced her husband Ahab to be one of the most vile and cruel kings that ever sat on the throne of Israel. And what I have said," continued Mr. C——, "of the Scripture characters, holds good with regard to women in general, and the history of our own and foreign countries supports my opinion. The protection or persecution of the Church of Christ has, in many instances, originated in women; for instance, when, by the preaching of Luther, people's eyes were opened to the errors of Popery, and the truth of Christ faithfully declared induced them to embrace a new religion, enemies, as in the days of the Apostles, quickly appeared on all sides, and, just at the most needful time, the Princess Margaret of Valois, sister to Francis I., King of France, was raised up to watch over and protect the interests of the infant Church in that kingdom. Of her it is recorded, 'that to do good and prevent evil was her ruling passion;' and when ambassadors from other courts waited upon the king, they would then go to her, and her brother would oftentimes leave matters of importance to her, to be settled according to her judgment and discretion; and a pious historian of those times adds these words, so applicable to our subject: 'The gentle influence of woman gained

admission for the new doctrine; and it is, perhaps, to this period we should trace the inclination of many of the French nobility to embrace the religion of the Bible—Protestantism.’

“Thus, my friends, we have seen the good effects of a holy woman’s influence; before we quit our subject I must reverse the picture.—The devout and honourable women of Antioch in Pisidia raised persecution against the Apostles, because they thought that Christianity would destroy Judaism; in like manner, when the preaching of the Gospel and the spread of the Bible enabled people to see the follies and errors of Popery, and hundreds were becoming converts to the faith of Christ, then the cry of persecution again was raised; at the instigation of Catherine de Medicis, mother of Charles IX., King of France, that wretched country flowed with Protestant blood, sixty thousand of her people being massacred by order of this blood-thirsty queen, whose deeds of violence were so highly commended by the Pope Gregory XIII., that he dared to blaspheme the Majesty of Heaven by publicly returning thanks for the massacre, and causing a medal to be struck to commemorate the carnage! The heart revolts at such details as these, traced to woman’s influence. How different to view her in the sphere marked out by her Almighty Father, as bringing up her little ones in the path of holiness, and leading their infant minds to the knowledge of Jehovah Jesus. Yes, there it is she truly shines; and when we, my friends,” added Mr. C——, a tear quivering in his eye, “stand forth as teachers of others, we continually remember those holy lessons first taught us by our beloved mothers. It was they who enclosed our infant hands within their own and instructed us to call upon God as our Father; it was they who pointed out to us those early portions of the Bible which are engraven upon each of our hearts, as distinct from other portions, for they were shown to us by our mothers: and I would entreat all who now hear me to remember their high and holy calling, and like the holy women of old to be adorned with good works; for ‘Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.’ (Prov. xxxi. 30.) ‘The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, and her children rise up and call her blessed.’”

“Yes!” exclaimed Hyford; “that is just it; and happy are they who possess such a wife and mother for their

children ; a family of this sort must be a cause of joy even to the angels."

"I believe it," replied Mr. C—— ; "truly, those persons who have not the fear of God in their households know not what a loss they sustain : but they are in secret miserable, though they know not why, and 'Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.' (1 Tim. iv. 8.) The unworthy treatment shown to the Apostles induced them to warn their persecutors of the fearful consequences of their wilful rejection of the truth, in the solemn manner enjoined them by the Lord Jesus, who said, 'Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment than for that city.' (Matt. x. 14, 15.) And having done this, they set off for Iconium, the chief city of the province of Lycaonia ; where they entered the synagogue, and 'so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.' (Acts xiv. 1.) For a long time they continued there, and spake boldly in the Lord, which at length so incensed the rulers, as well as some of the Gentiles, that they determined to put them to death, and consequently prepared to stone them. As soon as the Apostles were aware of this, they fled unto Lystra and Derbe, two other cities in the same province, where they were gladly received, and where they preached the Gospel.

"There they saw a poor cripple, who had never walked, and his case being well known to all around, Paul thought him a fitting object whereon to display the goodness and mercy of God. Therefore, 'stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, he said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.' (Verse 10.) As it was part of the Heathen religion for the people to imagine that their gods had at different times visited this world, they immediately fancied these benevolent strangers could be of no inferior dignity: they appeared to dispense blessings wheresoever they went, and the cure of this cripple was much too wonderful to be performed by man. They therefore 'lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter ; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.' (Verses 11, 12.) Jupiter was the

head of the Heathen gods, and was supposed to reign supreme over the inhabitants of heaven and earth ; but oh ! how different to our God,—the God revealed to us in the Bible ! There we learn that ‘ He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity ;’ that ‘ He is gracious and merciful, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth ;’ that he abhors evil in every shape, and in every degree ; but the gods of the Heathen were vile and sinful, rejoicing in hateful practices, and often worshipped with the most abominable ceremonies. Mercury was said to be the God of Eloquence, and this accounts for the people giving that name to St. Paul because he was the ‘ chief speaker.’ ”

“ But the gods of the Heathen were not altogether fabulous, Mr. C——,” observed Mrs. Basil.

“ No, madam,” replied the Pastor ; “ they were, generally speaking, persons who had become celebrated, either for the boldness of their deeds, their rapacity, their violence, or their vices ; thus they gained for themselves a name ; and women also, from the same cause, were equally adored.”

“ What a humiliating proof is this of the fallen state of man ! ” said Mr. Lawrence ; “ one of the first acts of Adam and his wife was to hide themselves from the presence of the Lord God ; and we have every reason to believe that idolatry began directly upon the confusion of tongues at Babel, and that Nimrod, the grandson of Noah, was one of the first deities.”

“ It was to raise mankind from this low and degraded state the Saviour came,” said Mr. C—— ; “ he beheld the wreck made by sin upon this fair creation, and in his love and in his pity he visited us ; he came not as an angry God, an offended Deity, but as a loving Friend seeking to recover his own, and restore them to that glorious station from whence they had fallen.—Yes, ‘ in times past,’ he ‘ suffered all nations to walk in their own ways,’ but his appearance upon earth produced a mighty change ; the idols of silver and gold were to crumble into dust before the Lord of life and glory ; and his servants were to preach unto the people that they should turn from those vanities unto the living God, the great Creator and Upholder of the universe. But what a contrast in the treatment of the people awaited these servants of the Lord ! We have seen them worshipped as gods, adored as beings of another world ;—a few days afterwards Paul

was stoned apparently to death by those who had hailed him as Mercury!"

"What was the cause of this, sir?" said Mr. Hill.

"We are told," replied Mr. C——, "that certain Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, the cities which the Apostles had so lately quitted, and persuaded the people that they were men who turned the world upside down, that they came to destroy their ancient religion, and in fact, were unworthy to live; the consequence was that the tumult soon gained such a height, that they laid hold of Paul, as the chief aggressor, and stoned him, and drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead." (Verse 19.)

"So much for popular applause," observed Mr. Lawrence.

"Yes," replied Mr. C——; "and many persons have found it as empty and frivolous as did Paul and Barnabas. The only honour worth seeking is that which cometh from God, who never changes, but is the 'same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever;' and who orders all things to work together for our good. The treatment Paul received at the hands of the people was treacherous and cruel, the act of men only guided by their own hasty passions; but God watched over his servant, his work and mission was yet unaccomplished; through his preaching hundreds of Gentiles were to hear the joyful tidings of redeeming love, and therefore his life was yet preserved: the disciples stood round about him, imagining that, like Stephen, he had become a martyr to the faith; but no, by the power of God he was miraculously restored, his wounds were healed, and, 'rising up, he went into the city, and the next day departed with Barnabas for Derbe.' There he taught many people, and then returned to the same places where he had been so severely treated, satisfied to commit himself and his companion into the care of his Divine Master, while he went forward 'confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.' This was promised by our blessed Lord to his followers, and their history proves its truth; for enemies without and foes within beset the true believer on every side, and often cause him to groan, being burdened. But he would not have it otherwise; as a soldier of Christ, he has taken up his cross, to follow whithersoever his Captain leads, and he goes not forward in his own strength; he has

become so sensible of his weakness, and incapability of maintaining the contest, that he constantly applies unto the Strong for strength, he pleads the promises which faith enables him to turn to his own account, and thus he becomes more than conqueror through him that hath loved him. And what does he strive to conquer? Sin, inbred sin: with this hateful enemy he maintains a continual warfare; it is his burden, his cross; the consequence of a sinful nature, the attendant upon all the children of men. The regenerate alone endeavour to resist it, and they find it a sore burden, too heavy for them to bear; it follows them wherever they may be, at home or abroad, in public and private devotion, in society and solitude, in business and in leisure, in health and sickness, in poverty and wealth: every stage, every condition of man is exposed to this wearisome conflict, and on account of it the believer would be ready to faint, were it not for the gracious promises that meet his eye, and tell him not to fear, for he is loved with an everlasting love, and nothing shall set on him to hurt him. No, my friends, not one of Christ's little ones shall perish; Satan may rage, the world may allure, the natural heart may strive for the mastery, but the Captain of his salvation shall lead him on to victory, and crown him with honour, and glory, and immortality."

No. 52. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,
AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

The Conversion of Lydia.



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THE

NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

IN one of his daily walks Mr. C—— met with his worthy parishioner, Farmer Hyford, coming out of the field : the greeting was, as usual, warm and affectionate on both sides. United by the love of God, the bond of the precious Gospel, they felt they were fellow-heirs of the grace of life, and that they had one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father, who by his Spirit had called them in one hope of their calling. This is the great secret of Christian fellowship, and it was the privilege of the excellent Rector of M—— to enjoy it in common with many of his flock, to whom he stood in the relation of their spiritual father, having been the honoured instrument of inducing them to seek their Saviour, and lay hold of the hope set before them. After a long talk upon the beauty of the crops, the variableness of the weather,—that usual theme with all Englishmen,—and the improving condition of many of the cottagers, who were giving practical evidence of the benefit they derived from the pastor's weekly as well as sabbath instructions, Hyford changed the subject, and abruptly said,

“ I like the Acts, sir; I did not expect I should.”

“ Why not?” said Mr. C——, quietly.

“ I don't know, sir,” said the farmer. “ I took it into my head that it was merely an account of what the Apostles of our Lord, and particularly Paul, did, after the ascension of our blessed Lord.”

“ Well, and so it is, I believe ;” said Mr. C——, a little puzzled by the peculiarity of the old man.

“ Yes, sir,” he replied ; “ it is all that, and more. From the practice as well as the precepts of those men I see what true religion consists in. They never were ashamed

of their Master ; they confessed him before kings and rulers, as well as amongst the ignorant multitude ; they pressed forward, they were bent upon their work, they never seemed to lose sight of it ; the honour of their Lord and the value of souls was the business of their lives. They teach our parsons a faithful lesson. Oh, that they would profit by it !”

“ The Divine office,” rejoined Mr. C——, “ is as important now as ever : who can value an immortal soul ! Who can imagine the horror that will be felt if, amongst other charges against us, this should be added,—Such an one was lost through you ! Mr. Hyford, I often think of this, and feel that we are verily guilty concerning others, and that this is a deep and universal sin.”

“ It cannot be laid to your charge, dear sir ;” said the farmer, affectionately.

“ Do not flatter me, my friend,” replied Mr. C——, with emotion. “ May I, on my dying bed, be able to say with the aged Paul, ‘ I am pure from the blood of all men,’ (Acts xx. 26,) and have fully preached the Gospel of Christ ! Yes, may I be honestly able to say this ; not that I would glory in it, for even then I should be only an unprofitable servant, but that I may hear my gracious Master declare, ‘ He hath done what he could ;’ he has been faithful in the little committed to his charge. But, Mr. Hyford,” added Mr. C——, “ I do not think this a sin confined to ministers and teachers ; I think it applies to every one. There is not a single man or woman, or young person, to whom it may not apply : for has not every one a power which they exercise over the minds of their fellow-creatures more or less ? . Surely yes,—masters and mistresses influence greatly by their own example the conduct of their servants, parents their children, husbands their wives, wives their husbands, neighbours their friends and acquaintance young and old ; and, in proof of what I state, just fancy our village full of inhabitants, all zealous for the welfare and happiness of each other, and what a contrast it would offer to what it now does ! Talk of model prisons, or model schools, or model lodging-houses !—why, M—— would be such a model village as would be far more curious and well worth visiting than the Crystal Palace itself,—for it would present a type of millennial bliss, and show mankind what will be the glorious effects of the Princely Messiah’s reign.”

"Very true, sir," said Hyford; "and for certain it is not that at present. It is better than it was; we have got rid of the wakes, those excuses for evil; we have several valuable people living there, and our school is improving fast; all owing to your unwearied exertions, sir; but still there is much to be done, and a reminder that all the field is not ploughed yet."

"But I hope it will be," said Mr. C——; "and this has just caused me to remember that Robert Daniel's wife is ill, and sent word by her boy she wished to see me—a message I am always happy to attend to. You know she is very attentive, both at church and at my Bible readings at your house and the Warners', and I think she is very anxious to be taught."

"The time of sickness is often blessed to the poor," said Hyford; "it gives them an opportunity for thought, which is denied them in consequence of all their labour and difficulties when they are well. Go, dear sir, and the blessing of God be with you,—and may this newly-ploughed soil bring forth much good fruit!"

"The good old man is right," thought Mr. C——, as he slowly walked to the village; "the heart of man is well compared to a fallow field, barren, producing nothing but weeds; and instructing it, is like ploughing it up, and preparing it for the reception of the good seed of God's word, which must be daily watered and nourished by his grace, and warmed by the bright beams of Jesus the Sun of Righteousness, otherwise it cannot bring forth any fruit to perfection. Oh, may I be constantly found acting as a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, and continually employed in cultivating that portion of his vineyard that he hath assigned to me!"

Thus meditating upon his interesting mission, the pastor proceeded. It is not our intention to follow him to the bedside of the invalid, but we proceed to detail the instructions he imparted to his people the following day, when, as he usually they assembled at the Court.

"In proceeding with the Acts of the Apostles," he observed, "it is not according to my purpose to notice each chapter. It is more advisable every part is of equal importance, but the fifth chapter is occupied with an account of the first meeting respecting circumcision, which was a very important one. They were occasioned by the Jews' misunderstanding the similitude of Christ, and that the ceremonial

law of Moses must still be kept. They knew not the full meaning of the dying words of Jesus—‘It is finished!’—the work of salvation was completed; the law, with all its ceremonies, which were only a type of good things to come, was fulfilled, for he, to whom it referred, there and then declared it: the consequence was, that much disputing arose, and Paul and Barnabas determined to go to Jerusalem on purpose to consult the apostles and elders on the matter.”

“But why was it of so much importance, Mr. C——?” said Mrs. Basil.

“Because, madam,” replied Mr. C——, “it promoted false notions with regard to justification. The Gospel declared that all were saved who believed: these Jews taught that unless men were circumcised they could not be saved, thus in fact putting the ceremony in place of the Saviour.”

“How similar is this dissension to that of our day on baptism!” remarked Mr. Lawrence.

“I have often thought so,” replied Mr. C——; “and observe how promptly and seriously these holy men set themselves to check the growing evil. Would that it were so now! and that instead of going to the Fathers, or being guided by the views and opinions of men, however learned, people would search the Scriptures in order to see whether or not it is the truth.”

“And do we not find in the Bible that Baptism is Regeneration, sir?” said Miss Walters.

“No, madam,” replied Mr. C——, firmly, but quietly. “I have argued this point before,” added he, looking at Mr. Martin.

“Yes,” interrupted that gentleman, “and successfully, too. I have, madam, searched for it, for it was a favourite theory of mine, but I cannot find it, and am compelled to renounce it.”

“The members of our Redeemer’s kingdom,” resumed Mr. C——, “are those ‘in whose hearts are righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost,’—this is their character,—they are ‘called, and chosen, and faithful.’ Baptism cannot regenerate, or make anew; it cannot wash us clean; water cleanses and purifies the body, but it cannot reach the inmost soul; baptism admits us into the visible Church, even as circumcision did the Jews, but that is all: the Spirit of God alone can make us fit for the true spiritual Church, for companionship with the

‘hundred and forty and four thousand, who have their Father’s name written in their foreheads.’ St. Paul said of those men who were so busying themselves about forms and outward ceremonies, that they were ‘false brethren’ unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out the ‘liberty they had in Christ Jesus;’ (see Gal. ii. 4;) and so we may truly say of those who are labouring to spread a doctrine so totally opposed to the word of God; for, being washed in the waters of baptism cannot produce the glorious effect of teaching a man that *in* himself, and *of* himself, he is nothing; it cannot lead him to the Saviour; it cannot purify the heart; it cannot make men real Christians, though it gives them the name; therefore, to imply that an unbaptized person must necessarily be lost, is to place a ceremony in the stead of the Saviour, and the mere outward sign in the room of that sanctifying grace which alone can fit us for the enjoyment of eternal happiness.”

“I have often,” said Mrs. Basil, “deeply considered that, if attending to outward forms were so essentially necessary, what must have become of the Jewish females who had no ordinance whereby they were publicly admitted into the visible Church; and amongst all the multitudes who came unto John for baptism, women are not spoken of; which makes me think that the Virgin and Mary Magdalene, and the other holy women mentioned in Scripture, did not partake of this ordinance, though they undoubtedly did of the purifying influences of the Holy Ghost.”

“Yes, madam,” replied Mr. C——, “their lives and conduct proved that, besides what the Bible itself declares; but while, with you, I am quite inclined to believe not one was baptized with water, I am persuaded that they formed a part of that holy assembly gathered together in the upper room, and were partakers with the Apostles of the outpouring of the Spirit from on high. I mention this,” added Mr. C——, “in order to show you that regeneration is not a consequent attendant upon baptism, and that the vivifying influences of the Lord the Spirit are *as* he will, *where* he will, and *when* he will. But let us now resume our chapter. The council of the Apostles having decided that the Gentile converts should not be burthened with Jewish ceremonies, hastened to inform them of the result, which when they had read, they ‘rejoiced for the consolation;’ while Judas and Silas exhorted them to

stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free, and confirmed them in the path they had been induced to follow. But while the Holy Spirit thus faithfully records the labours of his servants, he sets down their faults likewise. We are told, a little further on, that after some days Paul said unto Barnabas, 'Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.' (Verse 36.) This was well; we can easily understand the desire of the Apostle to inquire after the welfare of his spiritual children. St. John declared he had no greater joy than to hear that his children walked in truth, (see 3d Epistle of John, 4th verse;) and truly I can sympathise with him! Yes, my dear friends, the ministers whom the Lord sets over his people, are such as 'watch for their souls, as those that must give account;' they are totally different to those who are hirelings and care not for their flock; who 'eat the fat, and clothe them with the wool, and kill them that are fed, but feed not the flock.' (See Ezek. xxxiv. 3.) These are they of whom Jesus declares they will flee and leave their charge the moment they see the enemy approach; but the true servants of the Lord love their people—they are their joy and crown, whom they watch over and cherish, even as a nurse cherisheth her children, and whom they exhort incessantly to continue steadfast in the faith.

"The proposal of Paul was approved, and Barnabas, accompanied by his nephew Mark, set about preparing for the journey. But to Mark, Paul objected: it seems that some time before, he had quitted them, and went back to Jerusalem, while Barnabas and Paul proceeded to Pamphylia; this greatly displeased the latter, and now he declared he should not go with them; the consequence was that both parties became positive, and the quarrel ended in Barnabas and his nephew joining company, while Silas and Paul set out in a different direction. By the brethren particularly recommending these latter to the grace of God, it seems as if they thought Paul was right. From henceforward we are called upon to follow his footsteps, for we read nothing further concerning Barnabas, who first sailed unto Cyprus, and without doubt laboured diligently in the glorious task whereunto he was appointed."

"Do you think, Mr. C——, that the last verse of this chapter has anything to do with the ceremony of Con-

firmation?" inquired Mr. Martin. "I have heard some persons say that it has."

"Nothing whatever," replied Mr. C——. "St. Paul went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the faith of the new converts; that is, establishing, strengthening it, teaching them more of the divine doctrines of Jesus, and by his precept and example building them up in the faith they had embraced."

"We have thus slightly adverted to the principal subjects of the 15th chapter of the Acts; the next is the one to which I wish to invite your attention. 'Then came he (Paul) to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek.' (Verse 1.) We are now first introduced to Timothy, whom the Apostle loved with parental affection, calling him his 'dearly beloved son,' and one possessed with more than common attainments, both spiritual and natural. He is a beautiful exemplification of what a Christian minister should be, his mother Eunice, and his grandmother Lois, having early guided his steps in the way of righteousness; for Paul reminds him, that from a 'child he knew the Holy Scriptures, which were able to make him wise unto salvation,' and instruct him in the way of acting both in public and private life. May you, my hearers," added Mr. C——, "who have sons, and more particularly sons whom you wish to devote to the ministry, follow the example of those pious women: train up your children for God; teach them to flee youthful lusts, which war against the soul; lay a solid foundation of pure, divine principles, drawn from the fountain of life, God's holy word, and water it daily with your prayers, imploring the Lord the Spirit to bless the seed sown, and beseeching him to grant that it may produce much fruit to the praise and glory of God. Visiting various countries, the Apostle and his companion at length arrived at Troas; and during his sojourn there, a vision appeared to him in the night: 'There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.' (Verse 9.) How beautiful and interesting it is to trace all the means employed by God for the furtherance of his word, and the consequent happiness of his creatures; for the knowledge of the former is invariably accompanied by the latter. Macedonia was sunk in idolatry; on it the bright beams of Jesus had never yet shone, and hitherto

the continent of Europe lay in darkness and the shadow of death. But now the veil of ignorance was to be lifted; a stream of heavenly light was to descend upon the nations, and, 'Come over and help us!' was the affecting cry."

"Of course," said Hyford, "that meant, Teach us the word of God, and deliver us from our low condition!"

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "such, my good friend, was the meaning, and being dictated by the Lord the Spirit, met with a ready answer: for, says St. Luke, who wrote the Acts, 'After he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.' (Verse 10.)

"I can imagine," added Mr. C——, "the pleasure with which St. Paul undertook this journey; he felt assured of the success of his mission; he saw a rich harvest of souls within his grasp, and he hastened to reap it. Loosing, therefore, from Troas, they came to the small island of Samothracia, the next day to Neapolis, and from thence to Philippi, which, being chiefly inhabited by Roman citizens, is termed a 'colony' by the sacred historian. It appears, from the 13th verse, that by a river side prayer was wont to be made: that some few had separated from the idolatrous practices of their friends and neighbours is manifest, and may be accounted for by the fact that Jews resided almost everywhere, and thus were instruments in the hand of God for preparing the way for the preaching of the everlasting Gospel. To this spot the Apostle and his friends resorted, and hastened to teach those around them the way of God more perfectly. The hearers appear to have been mostly composed of women, to whom the word of life must have revealed wonders; for the degrading superstitions wherein they had been reared had led them to regard themselves as inferior creatures, slaves to men, whom they looked upon as lords and masters, and superior in every respect to themselves. But the religion, even of the Jews, opened to them a new and more enlarged view of existence: they discovered thereby the value of their souls,—how much more, then, when the preaching of the Apostle set before them Jesus Christ as their Saviour, the Saviour of sinners, of all, without exception or respect of persons, who come to him as the way, the truth, and the life! Amongst these women, one in particular is mentioned by name, 'Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira;' of her it is said, 'whose heart the

Lord opened, that she attended unto the things that were spoken of Paul.' (Verse 14.)

"Here, my friends," added Mr. C——, "we find honourable mention made of this woman; her trade is spoken of—'seller of purple,'—that is, purple cloths, which were prepared according to the art then practised."

"And was that different to the present method of dyeing purple, sir?" said Mr. Hill.

"Yes;" replied Mr. C——; "the purple colour here spoken of was produced from shell-fish found on the coast: it was particularly valuable, as merely a small quantity of juice pressed from a white vein or vessel in the neck of the animal, when alive, was the treasured drop, and you may judge for yourselves the quantity required for dyeing the different articles. Lydia was a seller of purple cloths and silks, and while she gained her livelihood by trade, she also had time to attend to the one thing needful. This may always be done if we will: the drawing-room, the palace, the counting-house, or the cottage, will not prevent the prayer of faith, the petition of the heart. In the midst of the most splendid of courts we find a Daniel and an Esther; in the heart of a crowded synagogue we find a daughter of Abraham. (See St. Luke xiii. 11, &c.) Oh! my dear friends," proceeded the Pastor, "may the Lord look down and open your hearts, even as he did that of Lydia, and then you will not only attend to what you hear, but will hasten to give full evidence that not a word has returned void, but that you are doers of the word, and not merely delighted listeners! You may be much engaged in worldly affairs, but they will be no barrier to the entrance of the Lord the Spirit into the heart: 'Where there is a will there is a way,' is an old maxim, but a very true one, and I will tell you a little anecdote in support of it. Very lately a lady went to call upon one of the instructors to the royal children, and during her visit one of the princes came into the room: 'Have you had a good lesson?' said the visitor; 'and what was it about?'—'Religion,' replied the prince; and, after a pause, he again turned to the lady, and added, 'We always go by turns to mamma at this hour, and she talks to us about religion.'—'And does your royal highness like your lesson?'—'Oh, yes,' replied the child; 'I like it very much; and mamma makes it so plain!'

"Here is a proof of what I have advanced: amidst the cares of state, the demands upon her time, our beloved

Queen forgets not that she is a mother, and that she is to bring up those children whom God has given her, 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord ;' she daily meets them to give them lessons in religion, and sets an example worthy of the imitation of all who bear the name of parent. Well may a nation rejoice when the throne is thus based upon righteousness, for that is its true security; and our Queen seems to be raised up, in these latter days, to shine forth as a beacon to the nations, and to show to all the kingdoms of the earth the capability of uniting the sovereign with the Christian; the indefatigable ruler, with the conscientious parent."

"That is a beautiful expression," remarked Mrs. Basil, "'the Lord opened Lydia's heart ;' there is much comprehended in it."

"Yes," replied Mr. C——; "it sets before us the great Author of salvation: Lydia attended the ministry of Paul, and admired it; but it was the Lord, by his Spirit, who opened her heart, enlightened her understanding, inclined her to receive the Gospel, and taught her the full meaning of those gospel truths which the Apostle preached; and, as it was then, so it must be now. I would proclaim to you the same precious truths that Paul did; I would preach to you Jesus Christ and him crucified, as the way, the truth, and the life; I would urge upon you that there is salvation in none other, and that 'He is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.' (1 Cor. i. 30.) I repeat, I may never cease to remind you of these truths; but I can do no more; the Lord the Spirit must open your hearts to receive them, and then you will listen with profit, and obey with delight.

"Lydia gave evidence by her subsequent conduct of the sincerity of her faith; she said to the Apostle, 'If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there.' It is then added, 'And she constrained us.' She pressed Paul and his companions to stay with her, for she felt the happiness and privilege of having such visitors under her roof. Love to God is shown in love to the brethren, for true faith and sincerity in declaring ourselves followers of Jesus Christ are always connected with kindly feeling towards his people. 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another,' said Jesus. May this sacred bond unite us more and more, for it will manifest to the

world the reality of our profession ! In the early days of Christianity it was so remarkable, so unlike the conduct of the Heathen, that they used to say, 'See how these Christians love one another !' What a glorious singularity !—worthy of the disciples of Him who is revealed in the Scripture as the God of Love. Oh, may you know him as such, for 'every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God !' (1 John iv. 7.)"

No. 53. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,

AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

Taylor at Philippi.



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THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

“ We were compelled to divide our chapter when last we met,” said Mr. C—— to his friends, when they again assembled at M—— Court ; “ it was too interesting for us only briefly to notice it, and contained truths much too important lightly to be passed over.”

“ Yes,” said Hyford, “ I have several times thought of the affecting invitation of the men of Macedonia, ‘ Come over into Macedonia, and help us.’ ”

“ If, my good friend,” said Mr. Lawrence, “ you had travelled in foreign lands, and beheld, as I have done, the religious destitution of the great mass of mankind, you would indeed feel how applicable is the cry even in our own times : what a call it is upon us to whom the word of salvation has been sent, to endeavour, by every means in our power, to support the cause of missions, and by our prayers and exertions seek to render our ignorant fellow-creatures partakers of our good things. The greater part of Europe is under the dominion of Popery, the great *Western* Antichrist, that fearful apostacy from the simplicity of the truth as it is in Jesus, and which the Bible proves to be false, both in its precept and its practice. Asia is darkened by the rule of Mahometanism, the great *Eastern* Antichrist, together with Paganism in all its forms ; while upon Africa the light of truth has scarcely shone at all, and North and South America seem a mixture of good and bad. Such is the religious state of mankind ; and surely its call may be heard in this land of Bibles, ‘ Come over and help us.’ May we answer the demand ; and may we be duly sensible of the high honour put upon us, that to us God hath committed the word of life and hope, that we may not hide it as in a

napkin, but may freely dispense to others large portions of that great gift so liberally bestowed on ourselves."

"It is a pleasant sight," said Mr. Basil, "to look upon that corner of the Crystal Palace occupied by God's word; there the Word of Life stands open in one hundred and thirty-eight different languages, inviting each foreigner as he passes along to read the truths it proclaims. It is no *closed* book, like the gaudy missals, set forth to display their splendid covers and beautiful workmanship. No; it is the copy of glory drawn for human use, and laid bare to the notice of the tens of thousands that flock to that wondrous spot. There the various nations of the earth may see the book which has brought them together under that transparent roof; the papist, the Mahometan, the idolater, the worshipper of Zoroaster, the follower of Confucius, may there discover the path of life, and read in his own tongue the wonderful works of God. Compared with that corner, what becomes of the gold and silver, the diamonds and the pearls, and all the assemblages of this world's wealth?—they shall perish, and wax old as a garment; the moth shall corrupt, the worm shall destroy, the gold and the silver shall be cankered, but the word of our God shall endure for ever, and its precious truths shall stand when time shall be no more."

Mr. Basil seemed carried away by his emotions; he stopped, and looked confused. "I am not used thus warmly to express myself," he said, "but the subject led me on."

All felt the truth of what he had said: Hyford seemed in a fidget; at last he said, "Sir, I must ask you one thing. What do you mean by saying, that the Bible has brought over the foreign people here? I cannot see how that can be."

Mr. Basil smiled. "The doctrines of peace and goodwill set forth in the Bible, and by which I firmly believe our good Queen and her excellent husband desire to be guided, no doubt suggested the idea of the Exhibition in the first instance," he replied; "they desired to bring the various nations peacefully together, and teach them that all are members of one great family, whereof God himself is the gracious Father. What a lesson must the Mahometan and Pagan idolaters learn, when, on the Sabbath, they enter our houses of prayer, which from curiosity, no doubt, many of them do, and see no idols, no incense, no visible object for them to worship. Many

of them are thinking men ; they say, ‘ Why is this ? ’ They wander to the spot where the book of God lies open, and to their surprise behold words written in their own language ; they read ; they discover ideas that their heart tells them must be true : and I fully expect and believe that this Great Exhibition now in London was the suggestion of the Lord the Spirit, for the furtherance of his glory, and the increase of his kingdom ; not because of all the arts and man’s device that is collected there, but that these ignorant people might come into the country, emphatically called ‘ the Land of Bibles,’ and judge for themselves of its wealth, its greatness, and its superior government, all owing to its being delivered by the teaching of that blessed book from the thralldom of bigotry and superstition.”

“ And, to follow up what you have said,” observed Mr. C——, “ I trust we shall be overwhelmed with applications, saying, ‘ Come over and help us,’—‘ Teach us your laws, your religion ; for we see the difference, and would fain imitate it, but we do not know how to set about it.’ That indeed would be glorious results : I trust we may soon behold them.”

“ I hope so, too,” observed Mr. Lawrence. “ But we have detained you, Mr. C—— ; may we ask you to begin your chapter ? ”

“ We have seen,” said the Pastor, “ how speedily the entreaty from Macedonia was responded to. No sooner had the request been made, than Paul and his companions loosed from Troas, and in due time arrived at Philippi. There they preached the Gospel to many anxious listeners, and in the house of Lydia they enjoyed much hospitality, as well as intercourse with those who believed. But when did Satan ever leave the preaching of the truth alone ? He has his instruments always at hand to contend against Jesus and his word, and for the present he is permitted so to do. ‘ He knoweth that he hath but a short time,’ therefore he will lose no opportunity to seek to raise enemies to the doctrine of the Cross, and endeavour to lead men onward to destruction. In Philippi he raised the storm of persecution and opposition in a very extraordinary way, for a female slave, under the influence of an evil spirit, continually followed the Apostle and his friends, crying out, ‘ These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation.’ ” (Verse 17.)

"Was it not strange," said Mr. Martin, "if she was possessed with the devil, that she should thus speak the truth?"

"There is no doubt," replied Mr. C——, "that this unhappy girl was under the influence of Satan, who, to serve his own ends, caused her to speak the truth. He well knew that the proclaiming of the Gospel would destroy her power, and therefore he desired to bring down upon Paul and his companions the fury of the masters of the damsel, which would be sooner done, he imagined, by inciting the girl to declare at once who and what they were. The preaching of the Saviour is the destruction of Satan's kingdom, under all its varied forms; for though, through infinite mercy, we are delivered from the dreadful sight of beholding our friends or others possessed by evil spirits, as they were in the days of Christ and his Apostles, still we can see fearful proofs of the influence of the devil, in the wickedness and blasphemy which prevails, and which proves how far removed man in his unconverted state is from that holiness without which no one shall see the Lord."

"Well, that is very true, sir," said Hyford. "As I pursue my way, sometimes in the farm amongst my men, sometimes amongst the folks in the Union, and then again see others in their own homes, I am vexed and grieved in my heart to find them so bent upon sin, so totally forgetful of God and their immortal souls; they seem to glory in sin and to rejoice in iniquity; and when they are reminded of death and judgment, they say, 'Ah! that will come some time, but not yet; it's still a long way off.' Oh, sir, how true it is that God's grace alone converts the sinner; and one of its first acts is, to convince him of sin, and show him the need of a Saviour!"

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "it is easy for us to cry, 'Lord! Lord!' and yet not belong to him. We may know that such an one is the servant of the most high God, and yet be in opposition. Tied and bound with the chain of our sins, it is not until infinite mercy loose the bond that we shall be found at the feet of Jesus, 'clothed and in our right mind.' The unhappy girl continuing for many days to follow the Apostle, at length gained his attention, and, being grieved at her perseverance, he turned and said to the spirit, 'I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour;' when she returned to the full pos-

session of her faculties, and no doubt became a convert to the truth. Then came down the vengeance of the multitude, instigated by her masters, when they saw that their hope of gain was gone."

"Did she belong to more than one person, sir?" said Mr. Hill.

"Yes," replied Mr. C——; "it was very common when a slave possessed any qualification which rendered him or her especially valuable, to have joint owners, who divided the profit gained from such talents equally between them. Undoubtedly these men derived much profit from the soothsaying, or power of divining and foretelling future events, which this girl possessed, and which she lost when the evil spirit, by whose power she acted, was cast out. Her deliverer and his friends were then treated as the vilest and most disorderly persons, 'teaching customs, which,' said they, are not 'lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them.' (Verse 22.) Could anything be more unjust? A few words from these exasperated men set all the city in an uproar, and the magistrates, contrary to the justice and dignity of the Roman law, permitted the wild multitude to tear off their clothes, and then gave them up to be scourged. But was all this for nothing? did the gracious Lord of his Church permit his faithful servants thus to suffer shame for his sake, and give them no assurance of his unfailing love? We shall see. 'And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.' (Verses 23, 24.) The jailor seems to have delighted in his task; perhaps the holiness of the prisoners made him more bitter against them, united with his wish to please the magistrates; therefore, making the strict charge he had to keep them safely his excuse, he put them in a dark, miserable part of the dungeon, making their feet fast in the stocks, which at that time used to be made of large pieces of wood, which loaded the legs of the prisoners, and produced severe pain. 'And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened,

and every one's hands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.' (Verses 25—28.)

"What an interesting story we have here, and how various are the ways that God employs to draw sinners to himself. His name is love, and he shows that he desires not the death of a sinner, but that he should turn from his wickedness and live; and nothing is more delightful than to trace the workings of his Spirit in various persons. The Bible is full of examples of this nature: and we behold his divine power in the conversion of Saul; his gracious teaching in the Ethiopian noble; the opening of the understanding in the case of Lydia; and the awful display of his providence with regard to the savage jailor. He was sleeping soundly; his holy prisoners were praying and singing praises, notwithstanding their feet were fast in the stocks. All the fierceness of man cannot fetter the soul, for where the Divine presence is, there is liberty; it is 'He who giveth songs in the night,' (Job xxxv. 10,) and produces that 'peace that passeth all understanding,' and which the people of the world cannot comprehend. It does not signify to the true servants of God where they may be placed; his grace will still enable them to serve him; for you know that 'without him ye can do nothing.' Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises in their prison, and hundreds have followed their example. John Bunyan, who wrote the Pilgrim's Progress, was twelve years in the jail in Bedford, and it was during that time that he wrote that delightful book, an instrument in God's hands of converting many to Jesus. Martin Luther was put in prison by his friend, the elector or prince of Saxony, in order to hide him from the malice of his enemies, and while there translated the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into his own German language, whereby he was enabled to proclaim to his countrymen Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation. And I remember hearing a few years ago of an excellent woman, named Maria Alvez, who, when she saw an image carried about by some papists, would not kneel down and worship it. She was asked why she did not; she replied, 'She would worship God alone.' For this answer she was put into prison. Her

friends at first were allowed to see her ; they asked her why she did not kneel down ; she showed them the second commandment, which the poor people saw and heard for the first time. Maria was then put into a stronger prison, her infant was taken from her, but nothing could shake her faith ; persons passing by heard her songs of praise, and she was removed to a more distant part of the prison still ; but none of these things moved her, neither counted she her life dear unto herself ; and whether she is yet living, or has received the martyr's crown, I cannot tell ; but she is another sufferer from the tyranny of Rome ; another added to her black catalogue of crime. I might multiply tales of this kind, proving the faithfulness of our covenant God, ' who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.'

" The sacred services of the disciples were instantly acknowledged from on high ; a great earthquake arose suddenly, felt most probably throughout the city, but more particularly in the prison, which accomplished its terrific mission by shaking it to its foundations, bursting open the doors, and unloosing the fetters of all the prisoners, while their lives were preserved in every instance. The unhappy jailor, full of horror at the responsibility of his situation, which rendered him accountable for every prisoner committed to his trust, concluded all had fled in the general confusion, and that he would suffer a cruel death ; but just as he was about to kill himself, in order to avoid the dreaded fate, Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, ' Do thyself no harm, for we are all here.' (Verse 28.) Not one of the prisoners attempted his escape : that Almighty Jehovah, who had loosed their fetters, restrained their spirit, so as to cause them to remain, though free, within the walls. This was in itself a miracle, so totally opposite to the common course of events, and is another proof of the never-ceasing superintendency of Providence, which orders and directs the various events of life, and renders them subservient to his glory. Paul knew that amongst the heathen self-destruction was not regarded as sinful, and that the unhappy man, totally ignorant of the great and awful future, only wished to avoid present disgrace. Most timely therefore was his call, ' Do thyself no harm, for we are all here ;' an assurance that filled the jailor with such unspeakable delight, that ' he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before

Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved ?' (Verses 29, 30.) It was for the accomplishment of this great end that the apostles had been cast into prison ; this heathen jailor was to be brought into the fold of Christ, and, though he knew it not, was to be set forth to posterity as another and encouraging proof of the irresistible power of Divine grace, and the fulfilment of the promise made to the Church of old, ' I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out.' (Ezek. xxxiv. 11.) ' What must I do to be saved ?' the keeper cried : he had heard the slave girl say, ' These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.' And now he felt it : they could teach him, and he wanted to learn ; nature itself, at its Maker's word, had borne testimony to their sacred character, and he flew to them for guidance ; he seems to have forgotten all his other prisoners, and only to be interested in getting a reply to the one momentous question, ' What must I do to be saved ?' Oh, what a different man he was now to what he was when he went to bed ! then he gloried in seeing his prisoners fast in the stocks, and thought how effectually they were silenced ; now, overwhelmed with horror, under a sense of sin, he fell down at their feet, and besought their guidance. And what did the Apostle answer ? Did he say, as a popish priest would, ' Repeat so many Pater-nosters and Ave Marias, go on pilgrimage, give large sums of money to the church, and then all will be well?'—No, that he did not ; he said these few but precious words, ' Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.' (Verse 31.)

" This, my dear friends," proceeded Mr. C——, " is the only true reply that could be made to such a question: this is the Gospel ; believe and live are the soul-quicken- ing words that bestow salvation upon millions ; believe— yes, believe in him who is both able and willing to accept you. He died to save sinners. Do you feel you are sinners ? if you do, he died for you. He has made reconciliation for you to God, and though ' once far off, and enemies in your minds by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprovable in his sight.' (Col. i. 22.) Look well at the Apostle's answer, for it merits deep attention. There is no mention therein made of human works or deservings, for

heaven and eternal life cannot be purchased by man's endeavours: 'In us, that is in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing.' And after we have done ALL that is commanded us, we are but unprofitable servants: we have only done that which it is our duty to do. (Luke xvii. 10.)"

"Sir," said Hyford, a bright smile beaming in his fine old face, "I love to hear you put us all to rights, exalting our dear Redeemer, and just placing us at his feet, where we ought to be."

"Then, Mr. C——," said Mrs. Walton, "are good works nothing? Is faith everything?"

"Oh, madam," replied Mr. C——, "put each in their proper place, and all will be well. A tree is known by its fruit, and so is faith. A cold unmeaning assent to God's word is nothing. What says the Apostle: 'Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.' (James ii. 19.) Yes, they have seen his power, they have felt the effects of his wrath, and truly they believe; and you may do the same. You behold the wonders of creation; you see God inscribed on everything, and the breath you draw you are convinced is continued by him; you feel you are utterly helpless, and can agree to the words of the Psalmist—'Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth.' (Psalm civ. 29, 30.) You consent to all this?"

"Most heartily," replied the lady.

"So far well," rejoined the Pastor; "but this is not saving faith. The faith of the Bible 'worketh by love, purifieth the heart, and overcometh the world.' If you have faith in a person, you have confidence. When the Apostle therefore said to the jailor, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,' it was as if he had said, Have confidence in Jesus, this gracious Saviour whom we declare unto you; he is able and willing to save you; and 'though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' (Isa. i. 18.) Trust him entirely; he has wrought out a righteousness for you which is perfect, and by virtue of your union with him you will strive to live and act according to his will. 'I live,' says the Apostle, 'yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and you can imagine, Mrs. Walton, how a

person would live in whose heart the Saviour dwelt. His thoughts would be brought into subjection, his temper under control, his words giving utterance to pure and holy sentiments, his actions guided by the spirit of love. These are the fruits of genuine faith ; and thus you see that they cannot be separated, for such a being never was known as a *true* believer destitute of holiness, or, as you call it, good works. The jailor proves the truth of what I say ; the Spirit of God, who made him utter the anxious, agonized cry, ' What must I do to be saved ? ' enabled him to understand the reply, ' Believe ; ' and he gave evidence that he did so, for ' he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes ; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.' (Verse 33.) How different now was the behaviour of this man ! the lion truly was transformed into the lamb ; and he who wounded his victims with savage joy, now endeavoured to repair the evil, and cause them to forget their sufferings. Convinced that he was a sinner saved by grace, an object of redeeming love, the Apostle proposed to administer the rite of baptism, as the sign of his adoption into the family of the redeemed, or the visible Church of Christ. To this he gladly assented, and immediately, with all his family, obeyed his Lord's command, being baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. When the morning arrived, the magistrates began to question the lawfulness of their conduct with regard to Paul and Silas, and, fearful of getting into trouble, sent a message, privately commanding the jailor to let them go. He, delighted at the order, requested them to obey it ; but Paul, though ready to suffer anything for the cause of the Master he so ardently loved, considered it right to teach these unjust judges a wholesome lesson. ' They have beaten us openly uncondemned,' said the Apostle, ' being Romans, and have cast us into prison ; and now do they thrust us out privily ? nay verily ; but let them come themselves and fetch us out.' (Verse 37.) We cannot but admire the manly spirit shown by the Apostle on this occasion ; had they crept away, it would have been tacitly acknowledging they were wrong and their cause a bad one ; but in his reply he proved that he had truth and uprightness on his side, and that the holiness of his profession demanded that they should be publicly acquitted. Glad, therefore, to get rid of them on any terms, the magistrates forgot their own dignity, and came

to the prison, when they besought them to leave the place and depart out of the city without loss of time. This they did when it suited their convenience, for upon quitting the prison they entered into the house of Lydia, and when they had seen the brethren, and related all the wonders of the night, they departed, leaving behind them many seals to their ministry, and rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus."

No. 54. N. T.]

TRACTS

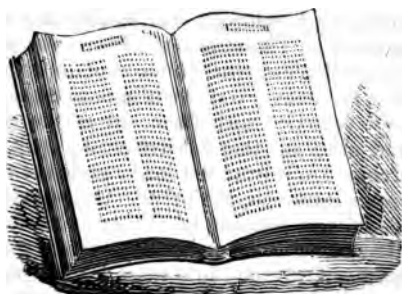
ON THE

NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,

AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

The Noble Bereans.



LONDON:
HOULSTON AND STONEMAN.
65, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1851.

THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

"WE have arrived at an interesting portion of the Acts," said Mr. C——, "our first introduction to the Thessalonians; and by referring to the two Epistles written to them from Athens, we shall, I trust, in the course of our chapter, greatly increase the pleasure and profit derivable from our subject. After the shameful treatment experienced by Paul and Silas at Philippi, it is recorded that having, upon their release from prison, returned to Lydia, and spoken comfortable words to the brethren, they departed, and taking Amphipolis and Apollonia in their way, at length arrived at Thessalonica. There was established a well-frequented synagogue, or place of Jewish worship, 'and Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath-days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.' (Chap. xvii. 2, 3.)"

"Are there any remains of Thessalonica to be seen now, Mr. Lawrence?" inquired Mrs. Basil: "I ask you, because you have travelled into those foreign parts."

"Yes, madam," replied Mr. Lawrence, "but it is now known by the name of Salonica, and is a flourishing commercial town; all the corn, wool, silk, tobacco, and bees'-wax of the ancient province of Macedonia being exported thence. It also has a large population, with a considerable proportion of Jews, who are nearly the same description of people as in St. Paul's days. In consequence of the walls of the town being whitewashed and painted, they look most extraordinary; and I learnt that it is one of the few remaining cities in Greece which has retained its ancient form of fortification; but the houses are miserable,

built of unburnt bricks, and little better than common huts. The country was conquered by the Romans, B. C. 168, and divided into four parts, Thessalonica being the capital or principal city."

"Such, my friends," resumed Mr. C——, "is the present character of the place where Paul and Silas continued for a time. I love to dwell upon scenes such as these, and to find towns and cities yet in existence which have been immortalized by the notice taken of them in the Bible. The Jewish synagogue afforded an excellent opportunity for the Apostle to declare amongst his countrymen the 'unsearchable riches of Christ,' proving to them from their own Scriptures that he was indeed that Saviour that should come into the world. But doctrine such as this displeased both Jews and Gentiles; the former, as usual, were enraged at being accused as the murderers of the Lord of Glory, and the latter were so bigoted to their idols that they could not endure the pure and holy word of God. The inhabitants delighted in idolatry, and to destroy this detestable practice the Apostle earnestly besought them to listen, accompanying his instructions with prayers and exhortations, that they might become followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. At length his ministry was acknowledged; the Lord the Spirit caused the Gospel to come unto them, 'not in word only, but also in power,' and they who had been wanderers in the superstitions of paganism became so changed that they were 'ensamples to all that believed in Macedonia and Achaia,' and in 'every place their faith was spread abroad,' because with all sincerity they had 'turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God.' (See 1 Thess. i. 5—9.) As may be supposed, the society of the servants of God was very precious to the converts, which consisted of Jews and Greeks, many women of rank being amongst them. (See Acts xvii. 4.)"

"How generally it is noticed when women embraced the truth," remarked Mr. Lawrence. "The awful state of degradation to which the Eastern women are reduced, renders this notice of them in the Bible peculiarly interesting."

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "it is Christianity that has exalted woman to her proper place in society; it is the influence of the Gospel of Jesus directly or indirectly that has completely changed the female position. In those lands under the dominion of Mahometanism or paganism,

the state of the women is deplorable; kept in utter ignorance, they are the slaves of the man, and they pass their life in subjection to his will, in servile drudgery, or the most listless idleness. But oh! how different her condition in a Christian land: what a beautiful position in society is occupied by the British mother, wife, and daughter; by her who, under the influence of the Spirit from above, seeks to perform her duty in the relative situations of life, and is the chosen instrument in God's hands to increase his glory and extend the happiness of her fellow-creatures. We scarcely ever hear of an active, pious minister who does not trace his first impressions of holiness to his beloved mother's lips; and I feel so sure of this being the case, that I do not think a mother's counsel and a mother's prayer is ever offered in vain."

"I agree with you," said Mr. Basil, "and you are indeed right when you say she is the chosen instrument to increase God's glory; for does she not, in the person of the son she has so piously trained, declare the glad tidings of salvation? and in this sense is she not a mother in the spiritual Israel, causing many to arise up and call her blessed? Yes, truly, such an one shall indeed be praised, and her 'price is far above rubies;' while, on the contrary, the gay and the trifling, the idle and the foolish, the fashionable and the pleasure-seeking dame is declared by the Spirit of God to be '*dead* while she liveth.' (1 Tim. v. 6.)"

"The success attendant upon the preaching of the Gospel," resumed Mr. C——, "of necessity created an uproar; the unbelieving Jews, as usual, being provoked that the Gentiles also should be instructed in the way of life. They would neither enter heaven themselves, nor permit others, and therefore they determined to lay violent hands upon Paul and Silas, and for that purpose assaulted the house of Jason, who was a kinsman of Paul's and a Jew. Thus did this miserable people fill up the measure of their iniquities, and though at this very time their country was beginning to be torn by factions, and misery was at their very door, they were still so blinded by ignorance and prejudice that they continually rejected the offers of reconciliation and forgiveness made to them by their heavenly Father. Having searched in vain for the Apostle and his companions, they laid hold of Jason, and drew him and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, saying, 'Those that have turned the world upside down, are come hither also.' (Chap. xvii. 6.)"

"Well," said Hyford, "that was a pleasant character to give them, but," added the old man, looking very significantly, "these folks were not singular in the opinion they gave of these holy men."

"Perhaps not," replied Mr. C——, with a smile.

"Indeed, sir," rejoined Hyford, "it was said of you once, and I say it of you now: and you must let me prove it."

"Proceed," said the pastor, greatly amused.

"Well, sir, when you began to preach doctrine so different to what we had ever heard in poor old Mr. Piercy's time, we all cried out, and myself the foremost: 'What! we must not allow all this; we shall be turned upside down. What is to become of our wake, our bowling-green, our skittle-ground, to say nothing of our pleasant jaunt to Worcester at the race time, if we permit this young parson to preach against us and our pleasures too, by his example showing that he is sincere:' for indeed, sir, parsons have no idea how constantly they are had up to the bar of their hearers, and tried by their own words; and if it is proved that in the week they act contrary to the advice they give on Sunday from the pulpit, they may just as well say nothing, for they are not heeded, and all their sermon is vain talking. But this was not your case: you showed us how to 'flee from the wrath to come;' you pointed out Jesus Christ as 'the way, the truth, and the life;' you showed the necessity of personal holiness; you declared the vanity of the world, and the sinfulness of its pleasures; and you enforced your precept by your practice. Thus you prevailed: you turned this parish upside down, sure enough, for our wake could not continue because there were none to frequent it; our skittle-ground and bowling-green vanished, because there was no one to play; the public-house became a losing concern to old Price, who had kept it for many years, but was glad enough to part with it; and you well know, sir, that now it is in reality a shelter for the traveller, and that a better conducted house is not to be found, for I believe the landlord and all his family consistent excellent folks. Well," continued the old man, looking round with a smile of triumph, "have I not made my words good, and has not our parson here acted like St. Paul himself, and turned this little world of ours upside down?"

"Indeed I think he must plead guilty," said Mr. Lawrence, laughing; "and I only wish there were many

more that would do the same; then we should find the happiness of mankind increased, for I am very certain it is only religion that produces solid peace or real comfort."

"Well," said Mr. C——, "now you have proved how troublesome I have been in M—, and for which I thank God with all my heart, I must proceed with the events recorded in our chapter. The violence of the people greatly disturbed the brethren; they feared for the life of their beloved friends, and that if they continued in Thessalonica they might have a repetition of the insults they had met with in Philippi. They insisted therefore upon their departing, and prevailed upon them to leave the city by night, and hasten to Berea, a place about thirty-five miles from Thessalonica, and which, though not of much consequence in a political point of view, yet contained inhabitants of a very different disposition, who have obtained for themselves a glorious character in the Scriptures of truth. As usual, Paul and Silas entered the synagogue of the Jews in order to preach a crucified Lord. Instead of abusing him as their brethren had done at Thessalonica, they were more 'noble,' more liberally minded, 'in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.' (Verse 11.) What things? Whether the doctrine preached by Paul was true or false. And what was his doctrine? Even Jesus Christ and him crucified: man a sinner needing salvation and incapable of helping himself, and Jesus offering himself as his Saviour and Redeemer. This was the doctrine Paul preached, and which is reflected in every page of God's word. This the Jews could not understand, and nominal Christians of our day do not understand, and it becomes every hearer now to imitate the example of the Bereans, and bring whatever is set before them to the test of God's word, to see if these things are so. It is not, my dear friends, for you to adopt opinions and doctrines because *I* recommend them, and say they are right: no; bring what *I* teach you to the Bible; see whether these things are so, and if they stand the trial, you are bound to adopt them. And what a blessing it is that you are able to refer to the Bible—that you have the same Scriptures as taught and convinced the Bereans—that, owing to the glorious Reformation, you are able in your own tongue to read of the love of God to man, and thus find out for yourselves the road to happiness and peace!"

"Why do you say we owe this to the Reformation, sir?" said Hyford.

"Because," replied Mr. C——, "until that time the Bible was in Latin, or Greek, or Hebrew, and consequently was quite closed, excepting to the learned, few of whom cared much about it. But when the evils of Popery came to be exposed, the Lord the Spirit created in the minds of the people an earnest desire to know the truth. Luther, as I told you last week, translated the Bible into German during his imprisonment in the Castle of Wartberg, and when he first preached the Gospel in the market-place of Wittemberg, the reigning Pope, Leo X., trembled as he exclaimed, 'We must destroy this preaching, or this preaching will soon destroy us.' And it is the same thing now: it is the Bible that sinners dread; they cannot stand before it: it testifies of them that their ways are evil, and they dare not seek its pure heaven-born light. And it is the Bible, too, that the Pope, Pius IX., and all his priesthood dread: they cannot dwell together; they cannot agree in one single point; therefore, no wonder they hate the Bible and those servants of God who exert themselves to spread it far and wide, and under the name of Bible Societies translate the Scriptures into foreign tongues, enabling the natives for a trifle thus to possess themselves of the pure unadulterated word of God. They would, if they dared, destroy them all, even as the priest did in Birmingham, when he snatched the precious book out of a school-child's hands and threw it on the fire. And why do they wish to prevent children being taught?—why do they denounce and curse those who send their children to the Protestant schools? Is it not because they know they will be taught to read and understand the Bible, and that as soon as that happens, they cease to be Papists? Yes; they know it, and woe rests upon all who search not the Scriptures themselves, or who are in any ways instrumental in preventing others from doing it. The Bereans searched the Scriptures daily: imitate their example, and you will be like trees planted by the rivers of water, that bring forth their fruit in their season. (See Psalm i. 3.) Every day take a portion, be it ever so little,—one, two, three verses; hide them in your heart, commit them to memory, pray for the Spirit to bless them to you, and oh! how soon will you discover the advantage of the practice! They will prove sweet companions; they will talk with you in solitude, they will direct you in business, they will comfort

you in trials, they will encourage in the path of duty, they will convert the valley of the shadow of death into a bright and cheerful road. Shall I add more ? Yes, in the last great conflict, when the soul is hovering upon the very threshold of eternity, the Bible-reader will find one promise after another presented to his mind—one text after another sent to comfort and strengthen him, and a full deep persuasion that he has chosen that good part which he is soon going to enjoy, and that he is entering into the unclouded presence of that Saviour whom unseen he loves, and in whom he rejoices with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

“ Well, sir,” said Mr. Martin, “ I fully enter into all you say upon searching the Scriptures. It seems to me as if the true Christian must do so ; he cannot exist without it.”

“ The true Christian,” replied Mr. C——, “ esteemeth the words of God’s mouth more than his necessary food. (See Job xxiii. 12.) He endeavours to bring all his thoughts, words, and actions into obedience to those laws set down by the Lord Jehovah for his rule and guidance. Man, until he possesses that treasure, is like a ship without a rudder ; he has nothing but conscience to direct his course, and alas ! that is so defiled by sin that she cannot be trusted. But the Scriptures are an unerring guide, and if we submit to be led simply and entirely by them, we shall not fail to find the road to eternal life. Hold fast, therefore, your Bible ; it is God’s own book, penned by Jehovah himself, in order to lead you and me to the realms of bliss. Give it to your children, and teach them its inestimable value. The gold of California is lighter than dust when placed in the comparison ; and it is the absence of attention to its precepts that has turned the newly-born city of San Francisco into a scene of violence and murder, and the discovery of incalculable wealth into a fruitful source of distress and misery. The success attendant upon the preaching of the Apostle and the close searching of the Scriptures, caused many of the inhabitants to believe, and again stirred up the spirit of opposition and persecution amongst the Jews of Thessalonica, who, when they heard that the word of God was so successfully preached, took the trouble of travelling thither on purpose to prevent it ; which when the brethren knew, they hastened to protect his life by privately sending him to Athens, the most renowned city in the world next to Rome.”

“ Why was it so famous, sir ?” said Mr. Hill.

"It was the centre of learning," replied Mr. C——. "There the most famous poets, and painters, and sculptors, and wise men used to assemble; and thither the youth of distant places used to go to be instructed, in the same way as our young men go to Cambridge or Oxford. But Athens, in the time of St. Paul, notwithstanding all its wisdom and learning, knew nothing of the religion of Jesus: it was 'wholly given to idolatry;' idols were fixed up in every direction; and this circumstance caused a person to remark, that it was 'easier to find a god than a man in Athens;' by which he meant to ridicule their images, which abounded throughout the city."

"Then, sir," said Hyford, "methinks this learning was of little use to them."

"It proves," replied Mr. C——, "the truth of God's word, 'For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.' (1 Cor. i. 21.) Yes," continued Mr. C——, "by wisdom, learning, philosophy, and mere human study, mankind would never have discovered the road to heaven. The wisest men of Athens knew not anything that could give them real happiness. They studied night and day, but it all ended in disappointment; they sought for something beyond worshipping blocks of wood and stone, but could not tell where to find it. They felt there was an hereafter, they imagined there must be a heaven and a hell; but where? How ardently did some of them long for information! what would they not have given to hear the precious truths that you hear continually, and which the Bible enables you to enjoy! But it was denied them. The time had not arrived for Jesus to be proclaimed in Athens; that honour was reserved for Paul. He was the appointed of God to 'destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent;' to teach these venerable philosophers, that 'except they were converted and became teachable as little children, they could not enter the kingdom of heaven.' Oh! it was hard doctrine for persons full of self-sufficiency and pride of intellect, to hear that all their boasted talents were as nothing; that their labours were only vanity and vexation of spirit; that the poor, the weak, the ignorant, the despised, were chosen before them, and that they, if they would be saved, must come with the abasing cry of the convicted Saul—'Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?' Yet such is

the effect of the Gospel when the grace of God applies it to the soul : it at once causes a man to see that 'in him dwelleth no good thing ;' that he is nothing, and that he can do nothing ; and that salvation from first to last proceeds alone from the free grace and mercy of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, 'who of God is made to the believer wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, that no flesh should glory in his presence ; for he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.' (1 Cor. i. 24—31.) "Nothing can be more delightful," continued the teacher, "than to see a person endowed with talents, the rich gifts of his heavenly Father, employing them to his glory, and for the benefit of his fellow-creatures ; to hear him say—'Of thine own I give thee, for I have nothing but what I received of thee ; let them be devoted to thy service and sanctified in thy cause, and then I shall bless Him who has been so gracious and liberal to his servant.' The day has arrived," added Mr. C——, "when this is the case with many ; when men and women, blessed with talents and learning, devote them entirely to the sacred cause, and labour with apostolic zeal for the extension of the kingdom of Christ. Like Paul, their spirit is stirred within them when they see their fellow-creatures living in sinful neglect of their precious souls ; they strive to teach them, they implore them to seek the Lord while he may be found, and if with missionary spirit they leave this happy country to preach among the heathen the way of salvation, oh ! how earnestly do they strive, how unweariedly they labour ; for they see a great and glorious harvest before them, and they burn with anxiety to prepare it for their Master's coming. And I, too, feel the same ardent spirit, my dear friends," added Mr. C——; "I, too, earnestly desire that each of you may be taught by the Lord the Spirit more and more ; that while some amongst us have been called and chosen, increase of grace may be given to enable you to be faithful unto death, 'to hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown,' (Rev. iii. 11,) and that 'being faithful unto death, ye may receive the crown of life.' But on the other hand there are those who, like the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision, have the sinews and flesh come upon them, and skin to cover them, and yet have no breath in them, (see Ezek. xxxvii. 1—11 ;) by which I mean, that they make a profession of religion—indeed, they

think themselves decided Christians, but they are only moral worldly characters, respected in the world from their decent creditable conduct, but totally destitute of spiritual life, and consequently all wrong, and far removed as yet from the kingdom of God. It is for such as these my spirit is stirred within me; though they do not worship the idols of Athens, yet they do in another sense follow after these lying vanities; for they worship pleasure under various forms, they idolize self, they seek for human applause, and their heart goeth after covetousness; and while they cry, 'Lord, Lord, open to us, for we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets,' (Luke xiii. 26,) they deceive themselves, for to their horror they will hear the Discerner of hearts reply, 'I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.'

"Who were the Epicureans mentioned in our chapter, sir?" said Mr. Smith.

"They were gay trifling infidels," replied Mr. C——, "who ascribed everything to chance, and denied a future state of rewards or punishments, looking upon death as an eternal sleep. I grieve to say there are many who *endeavour* to believe the same thing now: I say *endeavour*, for I am certain that in their hearts they think otherwise. They may *wish* to believe it, that so they may act upon that principle, 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die;' but follow these miserable creatures to their sick-bed, perchance their death-bed, and what then? Will they persist in saying they die like the brutes? No; fools they have lived, but they cannot die such; they are compelled to feel, if they do not acknowledge it, that they dread the awful future. The 'Stoics,' also mentioned in our chapter, were a sect of philosophers who believed there was a God, but they did not profit by it; they were self-righteous pharisees, who prided themselves upon extinguishing all kindly feeling, who cared for nothing and nobody, despised riches and poverty alike, and affirmed that pain and suffering must be borne without appearing to feel it. Such were the people the Apostle now had to encounter; men who thoroughly despised him, and ignorantly thought because he "preached Jesus and the resurrection, that he was a setter forth of strange gods." We shall see when next we meet, how ably he controverted such absurdities, and how beautifully he sets before them the Lord Jehovah, the mighty Creator of the universe, the

only object worthy of man's adoration. It would detain us too long to-day, for there is much in that discourse of the deepest importance to ourselves, and which I humbly trust the Lord the Spirit will render profitable."

With these words Mr. C—— closed his book, and though his hearers would willingly have tarried longer, the allotted period was elapsed, and accordingly they took their leave.

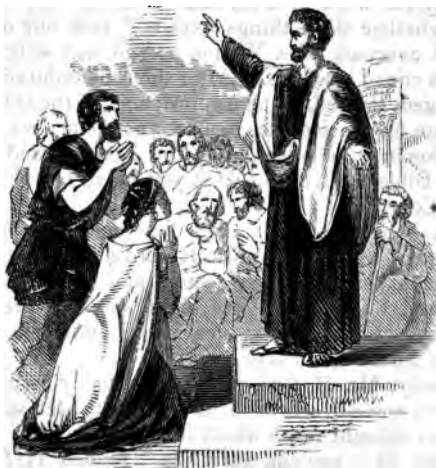
No. 55. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,

AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

The Athenian Altar.



LONDON :
HOULSTON AND STONEMAN,
65, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1851.

THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

It happened that a few days after Mr. C—— had met his friends at M—— Court, and set before them the Bereans as a people worthy of imitation, inasmuch as they proved all the instruction they received from St. Paul by the word of God, and “searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so,” that our old friend Hyford overtook Mrs. Walton as she was walking alone through one of his fields. After the usual salutations were exchanged, Hyford, to the astonishment of the lady, said—

“I am happy, madam, to find you alone; mayhap you are following the example of the Bereans, and proving by the Bible the truth of what you heard last Wednesday at the Court.”

Mrs. Walton smiled. Mr. Lawrence had made her thoroughly acquainted with Hyford’s character, and as she was a person of good sense, and really desirous to know and follow what was right, she was prepared to meet the old man in his own way. After she had recovered from her surprise, she replied,

“Really, Mr. Hyford, I am so perfectly satisfied with the truth and correctness of all your minister said, that I have not thought much about it since.”

“Very like, madam, very like,” replied Hyford; “I expected as much; you learned folks, whose mind is made up at once, do not trouble much about it; you are satisfied it is the truth and consistent with God’s word, so you are satisfied; but, Mrs. Walton, do you bring it home, do you apply it to your own heart? Don’t be offended, madam, if I repeat the question, Do you apply it to your own heart?”

Mrs. Walton looked at him, partly annoyed, but said *nothing*.

"I fear," proceeded Hyford, "you think me impertinent; but," taking off his hat, "look, madam, on these grey hairs; I have numbered threescore years and ten, yes, and more than that; and I know that in a few more years at furthest the sentence must go forth, for the grain will be ready for the sickle: it must be so; dear madam, permit an old man's word of exhortation. You say you were so satisfied with the truth of what you heard, that you have not thought much about it since. I grieve that this should have been so: you know, Mrs. Walton, you do not agree with Mr. C—— in all things; you know that you still cling to your own good works, and with a self-righteous spirit try to render yourself acceptable to a just, and pure, and holy God. Mr. C—— has faithfully endeavoured to destroy this fearful delusion, and you have listened to what he said for the moment, and then thought no more about it. The Bereans acted very differently, and I suspect it was to teach us to copy their example that our excellent Parson dwelt so much upon their conduct. When I first heard Mr. C——, I did not know what to think of him; conscience told me he was right, but my sinful heart said, Don't mind him, you will soon find out he is like all the rest, preaching holiness in the pulpit, and practising, not altogether unholiness, but worldliness out of it. Well, madam, I watched him narrowly, and I found that his daily conduct was on a piece with his preaching. This was enough for me. This man's sincere, I said, he is entitled to my respect, yes, and more than that; and while I was pondering the matter he preached a sermon on these words, 'For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?' (2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.)

"In that sermon he set forth the fearful state of those who reject the truth because it is contrary to their own ideas; he showed that we must bring every thought, every wish, every opinion to the obedience of Christ; that we must try the doctrine we are taught by the test of his word, and having done so, we are bound to adopt it for our own, or it will prove a 'savour of death unto death;' while, on the contrary, he proved that to the humble child-like listener the faithful preaching of the Gospel is most delightful and profitable, it is the 'savour

of life unto life ;' and as it first called them from spiritual death unto life, so it will lead them onwards until they attain to *everlasting* life. It was an awful sermon; and when he showed his own responsibility, adding, 'Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel!' I felt, dear madam, that he was indeed a messenger sent from God unto us, and that as such we were bound to receive and honour him. And thus he has proceeded; though young in years, he is old in grace, for he speaks, and exhorts, and rebukes with all authority. He has the affection of old and young, the confidence of rich and poor, and he is never satisfied until his hearers try his doctrine by the test of the Bible, and then adopt it from conviction that it is the truth. I have said a good deal, madam," added the old man, "and I ask your pardon; but I know you wish to be right, and think you are right, but the Bible says you are not."

"What makes you say that?" demanded Mrs. Walton.

"Because you place so high a value upon your good works," replied Hyford. "Pray read over with attention and prayer the 13th of the 1st Corinthians, and this will put you all to rights. It will just plainly set before you what you are taught in God's word, and I know your own kindness of heart will pardon an old man for thus speaking his mind."

"I do pardon you, Mr. Hyford," said Mrs. Walton; "I do more—I thank you for your faithfulness; I will follow your advice, and search the Scriptures with more diligence, that so I may profit by the opportunity now afforded me of hearing them faithfully and simply explained."

"Oh! madam," said Hyford, "how happy you have made me! Since our dear Parson has taught us better, how valuable has time become! I sometimes feel as if eternal life hung upon the events of an hour, and that I must speak to warn one, to encourage another, to lead a third, that so all of us may be found in the right place at last. I believe I am often very rude, but I never was at court," added he with an arch smile, "so I hope I shall be excused; truth is truth, though spoken by a plain English farmer."

Having with these words opened the last gate for the lady to pass through, the honest man with a low bow took his leave. Many thoughts of the most salutary character entered Mrs. Walton's mind, and bid fair, by the Divine blessing, to render her a Christian no longer in name, but in reality. Long did she ponder in secret

upon the conversation she had held with Hyford, and when she opened her Bible and found that he declared the truth, she felt she could no longer follow her own false notions, but was bound to cast them away, and earnestly implored the Spirit of God to lead her into the right path, and by his gracious influence enable her to receive the truth as it is in Jesus. It must not be supposed that Mrs. Walton parted with her prejudices all at once; no, the work was gradual; for He who convinced her of sin, led her onwards by degrees, and enabled her to profit by what she heard both from her friends and Mr. C——, who had been apprised by Hyford of the conversation that had taken place. But here we must leave her for the present, as it is time for us to resume our account of the Pastor's instructions, which have been interrupted by this short history of the effects of his faithful preaching.

As he slowly opened his book, and looked round upon his attentive auditory, he said, "If you recollect when last we met, we left the Apostle Paul at Athens, and while he waited to be joined by Silas and Timothy, who had stayed behind at Berea, he watched the general conduct of the inhabitants. But oh! with what pain did he discover the wretched, miserable state wherein they were all plunged; 'the city was wholly given to idolatry;' amidst all their learning, they were superstitious and impious in the extreme. He could contain himself no longer, but 'disputed in the synagogue with the Jews, and with devout persons,' desirous to be taught a purer and better faith, and in the 'market daily' with whomever would meet him. This conduct gained him the attention he sought for, for it induced some of the listeners to bring him unto Areopagus, or Mars' Hill, which is a steep rock, upon the top of which a court of justice was held, the seats for the members being cut in the stone."

"Yes," said Mr. Lawrence, "and the foundations of the court itself are still visible, being composed of squared stones of immense size."

"And how did they get to this place, sir?" interrupted Hyford.

"By steps cut in the rock," replied Mr. Lawrence. "I remember, as I stood upon that lofty spot, taking out my Bible and reading this very chapter, for the Bible is the best guide-book in travelling through those countries. I did not value its precious truths as I do now, but I felt

much more interested in the various places as I found them noticed in the pages of that wonderful book, and I recollect being struck with astonishment at the holy zeal and boldness of the Apostle as he stood before a set of superstitious, bigoted idolaters, who had the power of inflicting severe punishment, yea, even death itself, upon any who should blaspheme their wooden gods, or speak slightly of their impious worship."

"But," resumed Mr. C——, "personal danger never seemed to enter into the mind of this noble minister; he was at all times ready to be offered, for he never counted his life dear unto himself; all his desire was to extend his divine Master's kingdom, by labouring to win souls, and warning them to 'flee from the wrath to come.' When, therefore, the Athenians desired to know what his new doctrine was from mere curiosity, he evaded replying in such a manner as would gratify it, but at once launched forth into the most sublime and glowing language, accusing them boldly of idolatry, and showing the superiority of the truths set forth through the revelation of the Lord Jehovah to his lost and wandering creatures. 'Ye men of Athens,' he exclaimed, 'I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, To the Unknown God. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.' (Verses 22, 23.) How beautifully the Apostle commences his subject! when he accused these venerable fathers of being 'too superstitious,' they must have been self-convicted. Amongst the heathens were many of superior minds, men who longed to know something more than their own philosophy could teach. Superstition and ignorance had both blinded and bewildered them; you who have the Bible and the light of its truth shining upon you, have no idea of the darkness and degeneracy of those who know it not. I can scarcely find words to describe it, and yet it was plainly manifested in those poor miserable Africans who were lately being exhibited in different parts of the kingdom."

"Ah, sir," said Hyford, "did you see those strange folks? I thought them but a degree above the brutes."

"I did," replied Mr. C——, "and it made my heart very sad, and yet filled my soul with gratitude to Him who had called me out of darkness into his marvellous light. Our ancestors were no better than those poor creatures; clothed in the skins of beasts, and with their

bodies painted, the inhabitants of this our happy country worshipped idols of wood and stone. Those Africans know not God, and you can see it in their countenances; there is a want of that bright intelligence which sparkles in the eye of the Christian; passion is easily roused, and it requires much address upon the part of those who exhibit them to keep it under.

"The morning I saw them," proceeded Mr. C—, "they were sitting quietly smoking, apparently taking but little notice of the curiosity they excited. Presently one of them looked up, his eye kindled, he started up, stared wildly into a distant part of the room, put his hand over his brow to shade the light and enable him to see more clearly uncontrolled passion by degrees evidently gaining the ascendancy; at length he appeared satisfied he was right, he got up, stealthily crept to a table at a little distance behind him, and unseen by his keepers, for so I must call them, snatched up a couple of arrows, and was fixing one of them in his bow, when happily he was seen, and further mischief prevented."

"What did he intend doing: and what did he see?" demanded Mrs. Basil.

"A policeman," replied Mr. C—; "and had he not been prevented, another moment and an arrow would have pierced him to the heart, for their aim is sure."

"But what had the policeman done?" said Mr. Lawrence.

"When he was quietly taken back to his seat, and deprived of his arrows, the keeper said, 'That soon after he came to this country, he escaped from the protection of the person who brought him over, and wandering in the streets of London was accosted by a policeman, who imagined he was a sweep, and with more zeal for his office than prudence or compassion, put handcuffs on him and took him off to the station. This conduct had so enraged him,' his keeper added, 'that as it is one peculiarity among savage nations never to forget an injury, so whenever he saw a policeman he endeavoured to revenge the insult he received, thinking all were alike his enemies; and I have not the least doubt,' added he, 'that if I had not seen and prevented him, he would have killed him on the spot.' The correctness of their aim and the strength with which they draw the bow, was proved a few days after by one of them striking the weathercock on St. Nicholas Church in Worcester. Tired of confinement, so

opposite to their savage life, I heard that one of the men escaped, and ran with such swiftness, that finding it impossible to overtake him, they were obliged to mount a horse and pursue him, and after much trouble discovered him in a tree crouched like a wild beast. Such is man in his natural state; and not one bit more enlightened were the judges before whom the Apostle stood, notwithstanding all their boasted learning. Yes! they dedicated an altar To the Unknown God."

"Why?" interrupted Hyford.

"I was going to tell you," replied Mr. C——, with a smile, "if you would have given me time. The story is this.—Athens being afflicted with a dreadful pestilence or plague, invited a person named Epimenides to cleanse or purify the city, thinking by that means to destroy the infection. He carried several sheep into the Areopagus, from whence they were permitted to wander whithersoever they would, a person being appointed to watch them; wherever a sheep lay down, it was sacrificed as an offering to the god. Thus the flock were all, by degrees, put to death; but as it was not known by these miserable idolaters to what God they were indebted for the relief they soon after experienced, they erected this altar 'To the Unknown God.' Such is the story: into this the Apostle did not inquire; it was sufficient for him that he saw an altar erected in honour of some unknown deity; but it shall be so no longer, thought Paul; of him whom they so ignorantly worship I will inform them; these poor creatures never heard his name; they enjoy the benefits he bestows, but know nothing of himself; they shall be taught that it is 'in him they live, and move, and have their being.' Thus Paul no doubt reasoned within himself, and this caused him to exclaim, 'Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.' And were these Athenians singular? Alas, no. Thousands in the present day worship God ignorantly; they worship they know not what, (John iv. 22;) and being guided by the doctrines and commandments of men, fall into multiplied errors, and, unknown to themselves, set up in their hearts an altar to a god of their own fancy, but not the God, the Lord Jehovah, as revealed to us in the Bible. 'God that made the world and all things therein, seeing he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to

all life, and breath, and all things.' (Acts xvii. 24, 25.) This is the God now first declared unto the Athenians, and this is the God revealed unto us in the Bible. He is the Almighty Creator, Lord of heaven and earth, the 'high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity.' 'He dwelleth not in temples made with hands,' for no earthly building is fitted for such glorious excellence, yet behold his condescension—he says of himself, 'I dwell in the high and holy place,' (Isaiah lvii. 15;) this is his abode suitable to his might and glory; but what follows? Well may man wonder, for it is added, 'with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.' Yes, my dear friends, the heart of the repentant sinner is the dwelling-place of the Lord the Spirit, who imparts a new and spiritual life to those who ask for it, and leads them to worship him 'who is a Spirit, in spirit and in truth.'"

"Ah, sir," said Hyford, "this is very different to raising an altar to the Unknown God. I verily believe I did, for I am very certain I never worshipped him right until I felt I was a sinner and saw my need of a Saviour. I set up idols in my heart, and I loved them, and it was divine grace alone that destroyed them, and enabled me to part with them for good."

"How different," said Mr. C——, "is the pure worship of God, as taught in the Bible, to all the laboured ceremonies invented by man! whether we look upon all the vain rites in use amongst the Jews, even at the present day, the false and mistaken worship of the Papists, the bigotry of the Mahometans, or the fanatic zeal of idolaters, we only behold so many altars erected to unknown gods, the creation of men's heated imaginations, and bearing no resemblance to our gracious heavenly Father. St. Paul, after having described the character of the true God, next proceeds to show the connexion subsisting between men in general: he declares that he 'hath made of one blood all nations for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.' (Verse 26.) This must have sounded strange to these old men; but leaving them, let us ponder upon so interesting a truth for our own instruction. The great Creator of the human family watches over and protects all; his providence has directed their various habitations, and nations and kingdoms are under

his rule and governance. When we, therefore, reflect upon this mighty truth, that all mankind are brethren, how quickly it arouses in the breast of the Christian an ardent desire for the improvement and instruction of those who are in darkness and the shadow of death. It first produced in this country the determination to endeavour to put down the abominable Slave Trade, and leads the steps of the missionary into far distant lands, to teach his less favoured brethren those blessed truths which have made himself happy. Again, the feeling that God appoints the bounds of our habitation produces much solid peace to the believer. Constantly desirous to be found in the right way, he implores Divine direction, and he knows he does not ask in vain ; he fixes his abode where he has reason to believe his Master wills, and is satisfied ; and feeling himself only a stranger and pilgrim upon earth, endeavours to enjoy his blessings without being induced to rest in them, and take them as loans bestowed upon him for a season, or continued as his heavenly Father sees fit ; for of this truth he is satisfied, that ‘all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose.’” (Rom. viii. 28.)

“You remind me, sir,” said Mr. Basil, “of a friend of ours who has been visited with many and severe trials, but through all has been mercifully supported : she experiences a peace that is astonishing to those who, being only aware of this world’s consolation, cannot comprehend the perfect peace those enjoy whose mind is stayed on God, and who simply trust in him. Uncertain as to future residence, in answer to every query our friend’s reply is, ‘I am waiting—God will direct me ; if we are to continue here, and it is for his glory and the good of others, we shall do so ; when we are removed hence, it will be because he has work for us to do elsewhere.’ Need I add, that a faithful covenant God performs his precious promise to the letter to this his widowed servant : ‘*Great peace have they which love thy law : and nothing shall offend them.*’ (Psalm cxix. 165.) May we all,” added Mr. Basil, “trust God more, and depend upon ourselves less, and then all will go right both for time and for eternity. But do not let me interrupt you, sir.”

“Having shown the intimate connexion and interest between us and our great Creator,” continued Mr. C—, “the Apostle proceeded to invite his hearers to seek after

him, if haply they might find him, 'though,' added he, 'he be not far from every one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being.' (Verses 27, 28.) How little were those idolaters aware of the union between themselves and their unknown God! Alas! that persons calling themselves Christians should continually forget it also! For these poor creatures there was some excuse, they never heard of him before, and in compassion to their ignorance Paul was sent to them; but not to ourselves,—we know that God is omniscient, everywhere present; that *where* we are, he is; what we are *doing*, he sees; what we are *saying*, he hears; what we are *thinking*, he knows. Yes, dear friends, his eye is ever upon you, the darkness cannot conceal you from his view, for with him the darkness and the light are both alike. He is as your SHADOW, ever following you. 'Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.' (Jer. xxiii. 24.) Oh! if this truth were deeper impressed upon our youth, we might expect they would be more afraid of sinning; but it is not sufficiently inculcated. The midnight thief, the murderer, the drunkard, the swearer, the liar, the sabbath-breaker, would no more be found, if the idea of this all-seeing Eye, this never-failing Shadow, was remembered. A man will not commit an offensive sin in the sight and hearing of a fellow-creature, if he has a respect for him; how much more then in the presence of the great God of heaven and earth, who could, if he pleased, make at once an example of him!"

"Yes, and often does," said Hyford.

"Very true," replied Mr. C——; "still not so frequently as man's sins demand: the patience and long-suffering of the Most High is another of his glorious attributes: how seldom he punishes! how long he forbears! Occasionally we hear of some wretched blasphemer being made an example of, but oh! how seldom in proportion to the provocation he receives. He spares them yet a little longer, that they may have more warnings, more invitations 'to flee from the wrath to come,' more opportunities to ask for mercy. But if they madly refuse all, they must take the consequences. 'Those mine enemies,' said Jesus, 'who would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither, and slay them before me.' (Luke xix. 27.) Lay these truths to heart," added Mr.

C——; “let not the learning of this world blind your minds and prevent their being illuminated by Gospel truths. Some of the Apostle’s hearers on Mars’ Hill ‘mocked him, while others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.’ Howbeit only one of the Areopagites, named Dionysius, and Damaris, a lady of rank, seem to have been converted from amongst the higher classes; ‘others clave to them,’ but they, we have reason to believe, were of the lower orders, again proving the truth of God’s word, that ‘he hath chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom,’ (James ii. 5,) in order to teach learned men that by worldly wisdom they can never know God.”

D. 56. N.T.]

TRACTS

ON THE

NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,

AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

Paul before Gallio.



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THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

"THE active, varied life of St. Paul," observed Mr. C—— to his attentive auditors, "is a subject which affords infinite instruction and interest ; it is good to dwell upon it ; it constantly presents us with something worthy of our imitation, and from the hour of his conversion sets before us the character of the devoted minister, the affectionate friend, the fearless opposer of evil, the self-denying humble Christian. Paul exactly shows us what we ought to be ; acting continually under the guidance of the Lord the Spirit, he lived, he walked, he acted in every way consistent. He possessed none of the Jewish bigotry and narrow-mindedness of Peter ; and the firm uncompromising manner in which he treated that Apostle when he endeavoured to obscure the truth of the Gospel by his judaizing conduct, has been recorded as an example worthy of imitation. We must be straightforward ; the path to Zion is narrow, but it is plain, and a 'wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein.' (See Isaiah xxxv. 8.)"

"But I always thought it was very difficult," observed Mr. Martin.

"My dear sir," replied Mr. C——, "it is our own fault that it is so ; the way to heaven is plain enough. The soul convinced by the Holy Spirit of its state by nature, and led by the same Spirit to the Divine Saviour, finds peace ; but why does that not continue ? Why do we often hear the voice of sadness crying, 'Behold, I go forward, but he is not there ; and backward, but I cannot perceive him : on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him : he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him ?' (Job xxiii. 8, 9.) Why is all this ? Because sin has been compromised with ;

because, instead of simply looking to Jesus, we have been dwelling upon self ; because, instead of a crucified Christ in our heart, and a glorified Christ in our eye, we have been ‘measuring ourselves by ourselves,’ ‘and comparing ourselves’ with others, whereby, on the one hand, we become puffed up with a notion of our superiority, and on the other, with a debased feeling of our inferiority. Thus we lose our peace, we look to man rather than God, and are consequently punished by the absence of those inward comforts which are the birthright of the sanctified believer in Christ Jesus, and which those enjoy who simply follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. ‘Search the Scriptures,’ said Jesus ; not merely read them as a lesson, a formal duty, but ‘*search*’ them even as you would a deep mine that yields plenty of gold, and which will abundantly repay your toil. Oh, what a precious gift is the Bible ! Who can calculate it ? Suitable alike for the poor man and the prince, the ignorant and the learned, the old and the young, the simplest and the most highly talented ; it bears upon its pages the impress of its divinity, the love of Jehovah to his lost and ruined creatures. ‘Search the Scriptures ;’ yes, search them, and discover why man is now so fallen, so degraded ; why he is a slave to his passions ; why he suffers pain and sorrow, disease and death. ‘Search the Scriptures,’ and learn the cause why the miseries of life are borne with enduring patience ; why death ceases to be the king of terrors, and the grave no longer contemplated with dread. ‘Search the Scriptures,’ and see why the drunkard becomes sober, the covetous man liberal, the selfish totally the reverse, the gay and dissipated a blessing in their generation. Yes, my dear friends,” added Mr. C—— with increased animation, “‘search the Scriptures,’ they alone can throw light upon these apparent contradictions ; and though the Church of Rome, unhappily for her, tries to prove them insufficient to teach the way to heaven, yet upon examination you will find all your questions solved, your doubts lessened, your fears removed, your hopes confirmed. And, blessed be God for it, the Bible is in print ; no alteration can be made in it ; if the parts of our Bible did not agree one with another, it would immediately be noticed, and the mistakes, whether accidental or otherwise, would be rectified. Take therefore its precepts for your guide, its promises for your encouragement, its types for your study, its histories for your warning ; and thus, Mr. Martin, you

will soon discover, what I said before, that the road to eternal happiness may be narrow, but it is plain and easy to find. But," added the pastor, "our time fast goes on, and our chapter to-day will repeat the doctrine I have already advanced. We will now turn to the 18th chapter of the Acts. 'After these things, Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth.' (Verse 1.) He found no encouragement to remain at Athens; the learning, bigotry, and abominable superstition of its inhabitants blinded their minds to the simplicity of the Gospel. 'What will this babbler say?' they exclaimed; and without giving themselves the trouble to examine into his doctrine, they contented themselves with the idea that he was only telling them about some newly discovered Deity. It does not appear from the sacred history that he was persecuted; but seeing little fruits of his labour, after a time, he quitted Athens and arrived at Corinth. Were you at Corinth, Mr. Lawrence?"

"Yes," he replied, "I returned home through Greece and the Peloponnesus. It is now a long straggling place, known by the name of Corantho. There are some good buildings, and the castle is a place of considerable strength. I cannot describe the magnificence of the view from the Acropolis, the top of a high mountain that overlooks the town. The whole of the Corinthian territory is fertile and beautifully watered, but of the ancient buildings there only remain the ruins of a Doric temple, and a few others, which nevertheless sufficiently show the elegant taste of its old inhabitants."

"At Corinth," resumed Mr. C——, "St. Paul became acquainted with two most excellent persons, Aquila and his wife Priscilla, Jews, formerly residing at Rome, but banished thence in consequence of a decree, whereby the Emperor Claudius commanded all of their nation to leave it. With this couple he lodged for a time, and writes in reference to this period:—'I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself,' (2 Cor. xi. 9;) for he wrought with them at their trade of tent-making, that he might not be chargeable to any of his friends."

"And was St. Paul a tent-maker, sir?" said Hyford; "I thought he was a man of consequence, one of the gentlefolks."

"St. Paul was a man of good birth and excellent education," replied Mr. C——; "but it was an admirable

custom in those days, that all Jews without distinction were brought up to some trade, that in the event of being unfortunate in after life they might be independent of others, and able to gain their own livelihood."

"I like that greatly," said Hyford with evident delight; "now that was wise; in that case none of your idling, lounging young gentlefolks could be found, as we have them in this country, to the vexation and annoyance of all industrious people. You know what a plague certain gentry are to me, sir," added the old man with a significant nod, "how they trespass over my lands, ride over my hedges, destroy my fences, and worse than all, and which I mind much more, swear so fearfully, that they set a sad example to my boys, and lose no opportunity in ridiculing religion and every one who endeavours to practise it. Oh! I wish the Squire had brought them up to work, or trade, or anything, no matter what, so as it enabled them to gain an honest living, and gave them no time for tormenting their neighbours."

"Idleness is the parent of many vices," remarked Mr. Lawrence. "I knew a lad who was born to a fair inheritance: his paternal property had been in his family for several generations, and his father fondly hoped that he too would dwell on it, and not disgrace his ancestry. But alas! the father died; the boy was sent to school. Naturally idle, he could not and would not learn. When he was corrected, he tried to run away; and, in short, was the plague and torment of his widowed mother. Having unfortunately discovered he was heir to the property I have mentioned, he determined to live an idle life. No entreaties could induce him to adopt a profession: idle and dissipated, self-willed and foolish, he was the misery of all his friends, who beheld his property daily diminishing, and himself the companion of the same low profligate set who had ever beset him, and by their lies and flatteries prevented his deriving any benefit from the exhortations of his real friends. I need scarcely finish my tale, for you must anticipate the result. This descendant of nobles has lived to know want, and to prove that 'by much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house drop-peth through,' (Eccles. x. 18:) while in consequence of his 'hating knowledge, and not choosing the fear of the Lord,' the threat is fulfilled, for he has 'eaten of the fruit of his own way, and is filled with his own devices.' (See Prov. i. 29, 31.)"

"Yours is a sad tale indeed, Mr. Lawrence," observed Mr. C——, "and I greatly fear is no solitary instance. I believe very many of our young men have been similarly circumstanced. Oh! did they but know that 'religion's ways are those of pleasantness, and her paths those of peace;' could they but learn 'that godliness is profitable to all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come;' and that it 'will profit them nothing if they shall gain the whole world and lose their own soul;' then indeed we might have hopes of their restoration to the rank from whence they have fallen. But Satan is a hard task-master, and verily his people are slaves, deceived into his service by lies, and repaid with sorrow, disappointment, and death. But we must return to our chapter, for I have much to say to you upon it. While Paul worked for his daily support, he never for a moment lost sight of his sacred mission: 'he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Gentiles,' (verse 4;) which shows that his preaching was attended with success, for by his arguments and expostulations he persuaded his hearers to think upon what he told them, and to profit by it. But after a time the state of things appears altered: Silas and Timotheus arrived from Macedonia, and the Apostle became more urgent than ever with his countrymen to receive Jesus as the long-promised Messiah. But alas! the veil of bigotry and superstition and obstinacy prevented their listening to the Gospel. Even as it is now, they opposed themselves, and blasphemed; and oh, how fearfully distressing it is to hear a Jew blaspheme the holy Name whereby we are called! All we can say is, even as his Redeemer did, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'"

"How true!" exclaimed Mrs. Basil; "but I fervently trust the day is close at hand, 'when they shall look on him whom they have pierced, and mourn,' (Zech. xii. 10,) and when the voice of the Eternal shall proclaim, 'Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.' (Isa. lx. 1.)"

"May it indeed soon arrive," replied Mr. C——, "and this our elder brother be no longer a stranger in his Father's house, but restored to all the privileges and glories of the beloved first-born. But when Paul preached Jesus to them, the time for their reception of him was not arrived. When, therefore, 'they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your

blood be upon your own heads ; I am clean : from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.' (Verse 6.)"

"And did not this resolution turn the Jews a little, sir?" said Hyford. "Supposing if when we were all so uncivil to you, and treated you so roughly, you had left us, and put a curate in your place, what would have become of us? But, thank God, you were gentle and long-suffering towards us, thus imitating Him whose you are, and whom you serve. And now see the consequence: you are like a father at the head of a large family, and I believe all in the parish love and esteem you."

"Truly I have cause to bless God on your behalf," replied Mr. C——, "and deeply do I value the kindness with which you regard me. It is of his infinite condescension that he has blessed my ministry amongst you, and I trust to be permitted to spend my life in this lovely spot. Oh! may it never be your case in any way to reject God's word, for if you do, again there may arise a spiritual famine, and you may seek for teachers without being able to find them. This was the case with the Jews; they put away from them the bread of life, they loathed it, even as their forefathers did the manna, and consequently they lost it altogether."

"Why was this, sir?" said Mr. Smith.

"The Bible shall tell you," replied Mr. C——; "the eleventh of Romans enters fully into the subject, and gives the reason why it has been permitted: in the 11th verse it says—'Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.' Yes, the Jews rejecting the Gospel was the cause of God's manifesting his grace so abundantly to the Gentiles. Again the Apostle says, 'Blindness in part is happened unto Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in,' (verse 25.) But the day will come when 'there shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.' Thus you see St. Paul looked forward to the time when 'all Israel shall be saved,' (verse 26;) but until then the Gentiles were to be the chief object, and accordingly we find, upon proceeding with our chapter, that 'many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized;' and in order to encourage the Apostle's zeal, which might have diminished from the coldness and deadness of the Jews, the Lord himself appeared to him in the night by a vision, and said, 'Be not afraid, but

speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city.' (Chap. xviii. 9, 10.) How truly God's redeemed ones are called by himself, 'accepted in the beloved.' The Lord, who knows every creature upon earth, declared he had much people in Corinth, and the result proved it; for the Apostle continued there in obedience to the Divine command, and a large church was soon established. Is not this an encouragement to ministers and teachers? How do they know what is to be the extent of their labours, or what is to be the amount of their success? *Every* soul is precious, and ought to be sought after; and though some impatient people cry out, What is the use of spending time for nought? the believer replies, Wait: our Father's command is, 'In the morning sow thy seed; and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.' (Eccles. xi. 6.) It is not our business to stop to behold the fruit of our labours, but to go on, on, continually, leaving the event with our great Employer. You, Master Hyford," added Mr. C—, "when you are sowing your seed, do not drop in a grain, and wait to see it sprout before you plant another, but you go over all your field, scattering the seed with a liberal and equal hand, looking above for a blessing upon your industry."

"Quite right, sir," replied Hyford, "you have just described it; truly, neighbour Smith, we should cut a poor figure amongst our brethren, if we were to sow a grain of corn and then wait till it grew before we planted another. It is but little at that rate we should have to carry home at harvest. No, let us always give plenty of seed to the acre, and then, with God's blessing, we may expect a good return. And do you the same, dear sir, and by and bye you will, with the same precious blessing, find you will have abundance of fruit. You see, neighbours," added the old man with much pleasure, "what a practical lesson we farmers can teach our parson, though he is such a bookish man."

"Yes, and I thank you for it," replied Mr. C— with a smile; "the bright contents of the volume of nature are a lovely exemplification of the pages of God's word. The Author is the same, and truly

'There's not a plant, or tree, or flower,
 But makes his glories known;'

and invites us, his creatures, to read the precious lesson taught by all. Oh ! this is a fair, a beautiful world. Divest it of sin, and it is an abode fit for angels ; but sin, accursed sin ! how it has embittered all, and put its poisoned hand upon the dwelling-place of man ; the plants, the flowers, the creatures, all show the effects of transgression. But the day is near at hand when the picture will be reversed, and the 'desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose ;' for 'the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads ; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.' (Isa. xxxv. 10.) But we are quite forgetting our chapter. After Paul had continued a year and six months at Corinth, teaching the word of God among them, Gallio was made deputy-governor of Achaia ; upon which the Jews, determined, if possible, to rid themselves of one who fearlessly exposed their sinfulness and hypocrisy, hastened to accuse the Apostle of endeavouring to introduce a false religion. This was a subject upon which the heathen governor cared not to enter ; he worshipped idols, and followed a system most delightful to his own naturally sinful heart, therefore it was quite contrary to his intention or wish to trouble himself about sects and parties."

"Was Gallio a person of any consequence in his age and country, Mr. C——?" inquired Mrs. Basil.

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "he was elder brother to Seneca, one of the most celebrated men of his time. This was the fact, for Lucius Gallio, a senator, adopted Annæus Seneca, eldest son of Marcus Seneca, and made him take the name of Gallio. Lucius Seneca, the second son, was the philosopher, whose writings are renowned to this day, and who was the tutor of Nero, the Roman emperor, though, alas ! he gained his master little credit. Gallio is described as a man of great uprightness and general kindness of feeling ; but his mind being warped by idolatry, and debased by the emptiness which an interest in earthly things alone must produce, it was not probable he would trouble himself about the blind bigotry of his Jewish subjects, and we cannot wonder that he replied to them as it is recorded he did : 'If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you ; but if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it, for I will be no judge of such matters.' (Verses 14, 15.) We can scarcely

blame the man ; the Jews, as a conquered nation, were left to the free use of their national worship ; and therefore this Roman governor thought such a case out of his jurisdiction. As a magistrate he certainly acted right in refusing to assist the persecuting Jews, but he showed by his conduct that it was indifference that induced him to do so. He undoubtedly cared nothing for Jews or Christians, and deemed all religious contentions as beneath his notice."

"But was his conduct right, sir?" said Mr. Hill.

"Certainly not," replied Mr. C——; "as we proceed in our history, it will speak for itself. Having driven the accusers of Paul from the judgment-seat, he expected to be left alone ; but no, another persecution was raised against Sosthenes, a friend of the Apostle, by the Greeks, and him they actually beat before the judgment-seat. But even this outrage failed to rouse the cold-hearted apathetic governor ; 'Gallio cared for none of those things.' (Veræ 17.) Indifferent to religion, and the vast concerns of eternity, it was a matter of no importance to him how people acted. The world abounds with persons of the same character and disposition ; they hear of the sufferings of believers, perchance they may witness them, but it produces no sympathy, no kindly feeling ; they care not for it ; the Gospel is not to such the sound of glad tidings, for they do not feel they need it for themselves, because they are not sensible they are sinners, and consequently the happiness, the comfort, and well-being of God's people are equally indifferent to them. Oh ! may we be preserved from this careless spirit, which if persisted in, inevitably leads to eternal death. Amidst all this confusion, Paul continued to pursue his holy work without let or hindrance. God, who commanded him to remain at Corinth, told him he had much people there, and 'that no man should set on him to hurt him.' No personal injury therefore befel him ; and though, as we have seen, he was brought before Gallio, and Sosthenes actually beaten, the Apostle escaped uninjured, for the God of truth had said, 'None shall hurt thee.' It was of little consequence whether Gallio cared or not ; God cared and watched over his servant, and shielded him from harm, hence he was perfectly safe in the midst of the most violent opposers and the bitterest foes. May you learn from this the security of the redeemed. All the events of earth, of the whole universe, are under the immediate direction of

Omnipotence ; and though persons and rulers may act, as they imagine, according to their own will, each is in fact performing the purposes of God. The violence exercised by the Jews and Greeks against the Apostle and his friends, did not hinder the spread of the Gospel for an hour. God had much people at Corinth, and the two beautiful Epistles written to that Church prove it ; he kept his servant there as long as he had work for him to do, and then he departed with Aquila and Priscilla for Ephesus ; there he left them, for his anxiety was to reach Jerusalem for the ensuing Passover, but promising, if possible, again to return, and which we shall find he did, speaking boldly to the inhabitants for the space of three months, ‘ disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God,’ and ‘ causing the name of the Lord Jesus to be magnified.’ But we must not anticipate ; these things are mentioned in our next chapter, and I look forward with much pleasure to the interest and instruction that, with God’s blessing, they will afford us. In a few verses much is recorded of the Apostle’s zeal and activity, by which we have the manner whereby the Gospel was first propagated. Distance appeared nothing to him ; he went from Ephesus to Cæsarea, thence to Jerusalem, visited his beloved friends and brethren there, then to Antioch in Syria, where after spending some time he departed, and went over ‘ all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples ;’ and leaving an example to us to promote the cause of Christ continually, and never be weary in performing the task assigned to us.”

“ Before you leave us,” said Mrs. Basil, “ permit me to ask you a question relative to the vow spoken of in the 18th verse. What was its nature, and who made it ?”

“ As to whether it was Paul, or Aquila,” replied Mr. C——, “ is not plainly set forth ; but I am disposed to think it was the former, who, in consideration of his manifold deliverances, entered into one of those solemn engagements spoken of in the Levitical law, and which in the case before us appears to have been that of the Nazarite, the nature of whose vow is set forth in Numbers, 6th chapter. By the law it appears that when the days of separation were fulfilled, the person shaved his head at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation ; but when he was at a distance this was dispensed with. Hair being a type of the works of the natural man, Paul, by shaving

his head, significantly declared he cast away his own righteousness as nothing worth, for he had learnt that in himself dwelt no good thing, and that the righteousness which alone could save him must be that of one who is perfect, even the Lord Jesus Christ. May each of us experimentally feel this precious truth, and thus find Jesus to be our Wisdom, our Righteousness, our Sanctification and Redemption."

No. 57. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,
AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

Apollon.



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THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

"I HAVE been looking at the chapter you read last week, sir," said Hyford, "and find mention made of a very interesting person, one with whom I should like to become better acquainted; please to tell us a little about him."

"But you have not told me whom you mean," said Mr. C——, smiling. "We spoke of several persons, I recollect, for Paul's friends were become numerous, and some were roughly handled on his account."

"I know that, sir, I know that," replied Hyford, "but it is not of any of them I would speak, but of Apollos, that young man who preached with zeal, but not with knowledge. Yet he had no pride in him, he was willing to be taught, though a teacher himself, and thus showed that the grace of God was in him."

"You are quite right," observed Mr. C——; "Apollos was a very lovely character, and has left a bright example worthy of the imitation of young ministers. He was born at Alexandria, in Egypt, of Jewish parents, and well fitted for public service, being an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures of the Old Testament; that is, well acquainted with them, having them treasured up in his memory and possessing the talent of referring to them, and thus powerfully strengthening the cause he had at heart. But he yet had much to learn. As I said before, his knowledge was confined to the Old Testament Scriptures, which spoke of good things to come, for they foretold the coming of Jesus, and the establishment of his kingdom; but all was obscure and dull: it was like looking through a dim clouded glass, which faintly shadowed forth some glorious vision, and which caused the beholder earnestly to desire to have a clearer view; in other words, most exquisitely expressive of the same meaning,

‘ the Old Testament is the portrait of a great and glorious original seen by moonlight, but the New Testament is the same portrait seen by sunlight ; the one hazy and dim, the other bright and illuminated ; the one an intricate lock, the other the key that opens the lock.’ You understand me, my friends ?” said Mr. C——.

“ I do, indeed, sir,” replied Mr. Hyford ; “ I see that the Old Testament may well be compared to a lock, shutting up within it many bright and precious things which certainly require explanation, but which are rendered perfectly plain by the New Testament, which seems to destroy all difficulties. I often, sir,” added he, “ turn from one to the other, and find many hard passages made easy by doing so. Oh ! how differently I read the Bible now to what I used to do ; yes, and till only a short time since ; for now that I have adopted this plan, it is quite surprising the number of beautiful lessons I have learnt. But please to tell me more of this young man.”

“ Apollos,” continued Mr. C——, “ feeling deeply interested in the Scriptures he possessed, wished to spread the same precious knowledge amongst others, and being fervent in the spirit, he ‘ spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John ;’ that is, like John the Baptist, he preached repentance and the fruits meet for repentance, as a preparation for the blessings of the Gospel ; but of that Gospel, the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ, the necessity of regeneration, the influences of the Holy Spirit, he was totally ignorant. Priscilla and Aquila went to the synagogue and heard him. They admired his ardent zeal and fervent piety, but soon discovered how imperfect was his knowledge of those glorious soul-refreshing doctrines which proclaimed Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. They therefore ‘ took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.’ ”

“ How delighted he must have been,” exclaimed Mrs. Basil, “ to discover in the full development of the Gospel, that Saviour he so ardently longed to know, and to talk with these experienced Christians upon the wonders of redeeming love.”

“ Yes,” replied Mr. C—— ; “ Christian converse is, in the hands of God, a powerful means of spreading his cause ; thousands and tens of thousands now in glory have ascribed their first impressions to conversations held with friends, who had perhaps spoken a word in season, and were

the honoured instruments of awakening them from their fearful slumber. Little children have by their simple questions often led others to think, and induced their nurses to ask what they must do to be saved; and I recollect in particular hearing of a very young child who had the happiness of early learning from her parents the way to heaven, going into the room of a sick person, and in her own simple artless way, telling her of Jesus and entreating her to go to him as the willing Saviour and friend of sinners. She was soon to verify the truth that 'out of the mouth of babes and sucklings God would perfect praise,' for, a little time after, the poor woman recovered, and rose from her bed an altered person, declaring that, under God, she had been roused to a sense of her danger by the earnest conversations of that little child. No sooner did Apollos understand the full import of the Gospel than he eloquently proclaimed it to all who would attend to it, and, when he felt his mission at Ephesus was accomplished, departed into Achaia, where by his preaching and fervent zeal he became eminently useful, and helped them much which had believed through grace, thus proving the true meaning of those words, 'Paul planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.' (1 Cor. iii. 6.) Yes, it was by grace through faith that they at first believed, that they were led to see the difference between idolatry and Christianity, and were called out of the darkness of Paganism into the marvellous light of the Gospel. Paul was the chosen instrument for first producing this mighty change, and causing the cry to be raised, 'Oh! what must I do to be saved?' The voice of the preacher was accompanied by the influences of the Lord the Spirit, and numbers in Achaia turned to the Lord, who now sent the fervent, zealous Apollos to confirm them in the faith, and by his own conduct and conversation strengthen them in that pure and holy religion they had learned. Thus he watered the doctrine planted by Paul, nourished, fostered, and increased by the Lord Jehovah himself. 'For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ.'

"How beautiful and expressive are the words, that Apollos showed by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ," observed Mr. Lawrence.

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "before that glorious book all false religion must tremble. Therein the Jew is taught that the 'Law was a shadow of good things to come, but

not the very image of the things, and can never with those sacrifices which they offered continually make the comers thereunto perfect.' (Heb. x. 1.) The Papist learns that he must either close the Bible or leave his Church, for Popery and the Holy Scriptures can never agree, they are at total variance; and does not this fact at once stamp the fallacy and emptiness of his belief? surely, yes; that Roman Catholic who earnestly desires to do and practise what is right, opens his Bible, and there seeks in vain for penance being commanded in order to obtain pardon of sin; praying to saints and angels absolutely forbidden; confession, and absolution by the priest, not thought of; transubstantiation totally at variance with the ordinance of the last Supper as ordained by Christ; the Pope, instead of being God's Vicar upon the earth, mentioned, it is true, but as '*the man of sin,*' the '*son of perdition,*' 'whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and destroy with the brightness of his coming.' (2 Thess. ii. 3, 8.) While the once Pagan idolater learns to cast the abominations which he 'made for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats,' and rejoices in the glorious liberty the Gospel bestows on him. Oh, my dear friends," continued Mr. C——, "may we all endeavour more closely to imitate the zealous Apollos, and with our Bible in our hands continually go forth, and 'by the Scriptures' show to our ignorant brethren that Jesus is the very Christ, the Redeemer of the world. Having now accompanied Apollos to Corinth, we must take leave of him, and again give our attention to the acts of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, who, 'having passed through the upper coasts, came to Ephesus,' a rich and celebrated city on the Ægean Sea. There he found certain disciples, to whom he said, 'Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?'"

"I do not understand this, Mr. C——," said Mr. Martin; "surely these disciples could not have believed without the influence of the Holy Ghost; their reply, too, is so strange, 'We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.' (Chap. xix. 2.) What did it all mean?"

"I apprehend," replied Mr. C——, "that it was in reference to the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, which were so frequently bestowed upon the first converts. You are perfectly right in saying that they could not have believed without they had been led by the Lord the Spirit; but

this was totally distinct from those gifts of healing, or speaking with tongues, which were then so frequently bestowed, and which it appears they had not heard of, the instruction they had received being confined to showing the importance of repentance for the remission of sins. Most gladly, therefore, they listened to the more perfect explanation of the Gospel, and being soon made sensible of the infinite value of the Redeemer's atonement and finished work of salvation, they were baptized again, in the name of the Lord Jesus; and then," continued Mr. C——, "observe what followed; Paul solemnly prayed that they might be partakers of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, which was immediately granted, for they were enabled to speak with tongues and prophecy, and no doubt became active, zealous preachers of the word of life. The life of the Apostle was pretty much the same in every place wherein he sojourned for any length of time. Many seals, on the one hand, were added to his ministry; while, on the other, reproach and persecution awaited him. The great Head of the Church peculiarly favoured him with his approbation, for he 'wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul,' (verse 11,) and by 'signs and wonders and mighty deeds,' (2 Cor. xii. 12,) proved that he was indeed his chosen servant; for not only did sickness and disease depart before him, but evil spirits quitted their miserable victims and fled confounded. 'Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon themselves to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.' (Verse 13.)"

"This seems a strange story, sir," said Hyford; "I cannot understand it."

"These vagabonds," replied Mr. C——, "appear to have been strolling Jews, who went about from place to place pretending to tell fortunes, to cast out devils, and to work by charms."

"Why that is like the gypsies in these days," interrupted Hyford.

Mr. C—— smiled and proceeded: "You may imagine what a thieving trade it was: those cunning and deceitful men easily deceived the ignorant heathens, who were completely imposed upon, and quite willing to have recourse to them on various occasions."

"Well, sir," said Hyford, "and surely that is no more than what is often done in these parts. It was not long

since that William Jones's cottage was robbed, and the poor foolish man set off to the wise woman of Kidderminster, perfectly sure that she could tell him who was the thief. Of course nothing could be done without money, and he must pay her five shillings before she would take any trouble in the matter. After some threats on her part, she got the money, and then proceeded to business, assuring him she knew all about it, and that at such a time his money would be restored. I need not tell you, ladies, that all was wrong; she accused innocent people, and after further robbing the poor man he was obliged to sit down contentedly with his double losses, for between the actual thief and the old woman he was sadly treated."

"Very true," said Mr. Lawrence; "but I must complete your story for you, Master Hyford, and tell you the end of that wretched woman, as a warning to all who, like her, court the society and companionship of devils. Alas, poor miserable creature! soon after Jones's business she accidentally set herself on fire, and was discovered in her horrid den more dead than alive. I cannot attempt to describe her last hours: she was one of those who had sold herself to work wickedness; and alas! she reaped the fruits of it: not all the entreaties of pious compassionating Christians could induce her to listen to advice or counsel: she died as she had lived, without God, and without hope, the heir of misery, wretchedness, and woe. The heart sickens at the thought of such a miserable being, and thus it will ever be with those who 'make agreement with hell, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.' (Isa. iii. 10.)"

"Very true," replied Mr. C—, "and it is wonderful to observe how the sins in every age of the world are the same; the Bible makes them known to us, and also records their defeat and punishment."

"What did these men mean, sir, by saying, 'We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth?'" said Mr. Smith.

"They beheld," replied Mr. C—, "the wonderful miracles performed by Paul, they heard him set forth Jesus as the only Saviour, and that it was 'by his name, through faith in his name,' (Acts iii. 16,) that he was enabled to heal the sick, and do many marvellous works. Ignorant of the way of life, heathens by nature, by education, and by practice, they only thought of adding to their gains, and consequently attempted to cast out the evil spirits by saying, 'We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.' (Verse 13.)"

"I thought these men were Jews?" remarked Mr. Martin.

"So they were by birth," replied Mr. C——; "they were descended from Abraham; but to them may be applied the reasoning of the Apostle: 'He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.' (Romans ii. 28, 29.) These seven sons of the chief priest Sceva were Jews by birth, but truly heathens by nature; they cared not for God, they said, 'Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways;' the evil practices of the people amongst whom they dwelt increased the malady, and they appear not to have been behind the blindest idolaters in infidelity and sin. The address of the evil spirit," continued Mr. C——, "was remarkable: 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?' (Verse 15.) There is much implied here: it is said that Jesus suffered not the devils to speak, *because* they knew him. (See Luke iv. 41.) Yes; they knew that he was Christ, the Anointed of the Spirit, ordained by Jehovah's love to bruise Satan's head, and rescue his creatures from his fearful power. They knew him well. They had experienced his awful vengeance when he hurled them into hell; and, though veiled in humanity, they quickly recognised him, and were fully aware that in his hour of humiliation he was fulfilling his intention of mercy, and thus was opening a path to eternal life for all who would accept him as their Redeemer and friend."

"There is something sad in this cry, 'Jesus I know,' when we reflect upon the misery of lost spirits," remarked Mrs. Basil.

"There is, indeed," replied Mr. C——. "The devils knew him well; in their hearts no yearnings after lost *holiness* could dwell; but they must have contrasted their present with their past state, and mourned the awful change. To them no remedy is offered, no pardon held out, no Saviour given; 'everlasting chains under darkness' is their sad portion, and eternal misery their doom."

"I have often thought, sir," said Hyford, "how astonished they must be at the stupidity of man, who has salvation freely offered to him, and yet rejects it."

"Yes," answered Mr. C——, "and in this they triumph."

Their lost, ruined state affords them no alleviation, and revenge, therefore, has taken possession of their soul ; to endeavour to destroy man is now their hope and ambition, and for this they unweariedly work. In the days of Christ and his Apostles they appear to have openly carried on the contest, and though signally defeated, still to have returned to the charge : now their object is the same, and the effect the same, but the method of warfare appears changed. As Satan ever animated the pagan and heathen world, so now he labours in the infidel world, I mean amongst those who live without God and without Christ, calling themselves Christians, yet in works denying the Saviour, being 'abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.' (Titus i. 16.) Oh ! my friends," continued Mr. C——, "I grieve to think of the encouragement given to the prince of darkness. If I examine the moral condition of our population, both in town and country, I behold a fearful majority who seem bent upon their own destruction ; who, although living in a land where a Bible can be had for less than a shilling, do not care to avail themselves of the privilege, but seek for instruction in ungodly books, and for amusement in profligate writings. The evil spirit mentioned in our chapter declared he not only knew Jesus, but Paul—'Jesus I know, and Paul I know,' said he. Yes, he knew well that the Apostle was the servant of the Most High God ; that endowed by the Spirit, he wrought great and mighty works, and that he possessed that ardent zeal and genuine faith, which produced effects that he could not resist. While, therefore, the devil was well aware of the superiority of Paul, he denied all such power to the exorcists ; he knew them not ; he would not obey their command, but, on the contrary, instigated the miserable creature whom he possessed, to exert supernatural force. It is said, 'He leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.' (Verse 16.) Could any other effect be anticipated ? Satan is a powerful adversary ; and when he is permitted, can exercise an awful influence over soul and body. But, blessed be God, he cannot go a step beyond his limitation, and as we have seen in the case of Job, he may desire to torment, but cannot prevail, unless permission be given him from above, and which is often done that the name of the Lord Jesus may be magnified, and the enemy of God and man be more signally

defeated. Before I leave this part of the chapter, I would add one short remark," continued the Pastor. "It is said particularly that the men were 'naked and wounded.' Thus it will ever be with the souls of those over whom Satan prevails. When he overcame and deceived our first parents they instantly perceived that they were naked; and, ashamed and terrified, they endeavoured vainly to conceal themselves amongst the trees of the garden. The nakedness of their bodies was a just emblem of the state of their souls, devoid of righteousness, wounded by sin, and unable to stand before their just and holy Maker: in that hour the devils rejoiced, for they thought their malicious plot for the destruction of the human race had succeeded. But was it so? No, my dear friends; He who created man in his own image, and for his glory, permitted for an instant Satan to prevail, that his mercy and love, his grace and truth might be magnified. 'He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore his arm brought salvation unto him, and his righteousness, it sustained him.' (Isa. lix. 16.) And having personally 'suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them also that are tempted,' and cause all his redeemed ones to resist, and finally overcome, the most violent of their spiritual foes. The extraordinary event of the assault made by the demoniac upon Sceva's sons soon became known; Jews and Greeks dwelling at Ephesus heard of it, and fear fell on them all, for they were now convinced that the doctrine and practice of Paul and his companions was holy, and that the Christ of whom he preached was indeed the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. But they were not content with a bare profession of faith; they went further,—they 'confessed and showed their deeds,' being now convinced that the curious arts and incantations they had followed were sinful, and utterly unworthy of the notice of Christians. And observe what follows,—they 'brought their books together, and burned them before all men,' in order to express their hatred of their contents, and that they should no longer be a snare to themselves or injure the souls of others."

"They appear to have been highly valued," observed Mr. Lawrence. "Fifty thousand pieces of silver was a very large sum."

"How much do you think, sir?" said Hyford; "I cannot understand this outlandish money; nothing like

pounds, shillings, and pence to my mind ; that is good English coin."

"No doubt, you prefer it," replied Mr. Lawrence smiling; "but I must try to answer your question, Master Hyford, though it is not very easy. At the lowest computation it has been calculated that the amount was about 1,500*l.*, but some imagine it was very much more. We cannot now tell correctly the value of the pieces of coin here spoken of."

"Be it as it may," resumed Mr. C——, "it was a glorious triumph for the religion of Jesus: it proved the sincerity of these Ephesians; the pure and holy precepts of the Gospel plainly condemned the evil contained in these books, and which became hatefully manifest when viewed by the light of the Divine Spirit. Oh, that the example were imitated, and that all the infidel publications, the ungodly books, the impure and blasphemous works which even in this country are daily printed, could be brought together and publicly destroyed, while the unhappy authors were restrained by the powerful arm of the law from proceeding in their vile and soul-destroying labour! My dear friends, consider well the lesson here set before you; beware what books enter your houses, and what your children, and your servants, and yourselves peruse. The enemy of souls is ever on the watch for your destruction, and innumerable volumes are continually published, the contents of which tend fearfully to increase his dominion and power. Elegantly bound books, both large and small, are presented to our notice; but, in too many instances, the value is all external. Under the fascinating garb lies many a hidden snare. False doctrine, popish errors, tractarian heresy, are so interwoven with the enchanting tale, that the unsuspecting reader is entrapped before he is aware, and induced to adopt sentiments from which he would shrink with horror were they simply and plainly avowed. I tremble as I think of the hourly increasing evil; and my heart mourns over the youth of my country who are imbibing, in their very nursery books, the Popish doctrines of Tractarianism, and bid fair to join those who have made shipwreck of their faith, and given heed to 'seducing spirits and doctrines of devils.' The word of prophecy is now fulfilling, that in the last days 'many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased,' (Dan. xii. 4;) but let me ask, Of what description? While much that is good proceeds from the

press, a fearful amount of sinful instruction and information is likewise poured forth; and what is the consequence? The head may be more full of science, perhaps, and human learning, but the heart gets worse even than by nature; its total ignorance of its own depravity is fostered, false doctrines are clothed in the most alluring garb, the pure simple religion of the Bible is rejected for the trash of man's imaginary substitute, and thus the God of this world blinds the minds of those who believe not, lest they might be saved. Time fails me to add more. Oh, think upon the warning you have received, and be careful in the choice of the books you admit upon your shelves."

No. 58. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,

AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

Diana of the Ephesians.



LONDON :
HOULSTON AND STONEMAN,
65, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1852.

THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

"I HAVE to-day entered upon an interesting portion, my dear friends," said Mr. C——.

"But you did not finish your chapter last week, sir," interrupted Hyford; "and I, for one, am in no hurry to see you at the end of the Acts of the Apostles; they are not only deeply interesting, but very instructive. I have learnt a great deal from them, and I have found it a most valuable portion of God's word."

"I agree with you, Master Hyford," said Mr. Lawrence; "we must not let our good teacher go on too fast, for when he has finished the Acts, I am doubtful what besides he has in store for us."

Mr. C—— looked perplexed. "You have judged too hastily, my worthy friends," he remarked; "so far from hastening on, I must tell you that I have nothing like finished with our former chapter. Though we found much to instruct and interest when we last met, I am greatly mistaken if the subject for our present consideration will not be even more so in many respects, and through God's blessing teach us many a useful lesson applicable to our own times."

"It is deeply interesting," remarked Mr. Basil, "to observe how completely the Bible embraces every want of individuals, every class of society, every age of the world; it is fitted for all, every one,—for the highest and the lowest, the learned and the ignorant. Superstition flies before it, and vice hides itself in its hateful dens: it is the comfort of the afflicted, the support of the aged, the guide of all. But please to begin, sir; I ask pardon for interrupting you."

"Your remarks," replied Mr. C——, "are so just and valuable, that we sincerely thank you for them; you strengthen my hands, Mr. Basil, and you know it is written that 'the testimony of two men is true.' (John viii. 17.) It is a great pleasure to me when I hear my people bear witness to the truth. May you long be enabled to do so, that confessing Jesus before men, hereafter you may hear him acknowledge you before the assembled world as his 'beloved and redeemed one.' We will now turn to our chapter, and begin at the 21st verse of the 19th of the Acts: 'After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.' The things mentioned in this verse," continued Mr. C——, "were the events we before noticed, namely, the special honour put upon Paul by giving him power to perform various and wonderful miracles, and the signal defeat of those wicked men who thought to cast out devils by means of exorcism, or witchcraft. The Apostle spent about three years in Ephesus, and, as we know, founded a church there, over which he watched with paternal affection, 'making mention of them in his prayers,' and reminding them of the richness of God's mercy and love, which, when 'they were dead in sins, quickened them with Christ,' saving them 'by his grace through faith,' and showing them that although they were 'by nature aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world,' by the free grace of God it was quite different, for they were made 'nigh by the blood of Christ, who hath broken down the middle wall of partition,' and united them, in common with all believers from every clime under heaven, into one large 'family,' constituting himself the glorious ever-living Head. Read the Epistle to the Ephesians, and compare it with this and the following chapter in the Acts, which speaks of the deeply affecting interview he had with the elders of that church, and which will form the next subject for our consideration. The Apostle wrote to them from Rome at the time he was a prisoner; and bearing in mind what they were when he first went unto them, given up to the practice of all ungodliness and works of darkness, he beautifully admonishes them to 'walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called,' and to 'be followers of God as dear children,' allowing their conduct in all the relative situations of life, as

husbands and wives, parents and children, servants and masters, to form a manifest contrast to that wretched period of their existence when they were the worshippers of the heathen goddess Diana. And this brings me," continued Mr. C——, "to the more immediate subject selected for to-day.

"Let us turn to our chapter;—'And the same time there arose no small stir about that way.' 'The same time;' that is, when Paul sent Timotheus and Erastus into Macedonia, while he remained at Ephesus, preaching and disputing in the school of Tyrannus, and showing to the multitude, both Jews and Greeks, that Jesus was the Christ. 'So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.' But mark what follows: 'A certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: so that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.' (Chap. xix. 24—28.) Oh! how faithfully does this transaction unfold the depths of iniquity that lurk in the heart of man, and set forth the principles that always influence the professors of a false religion. Demetrius was a shrewd, clever, crafty, avaricious tradesman, who, under the mask of religion, was only in earnest about filling his pockets and getting rich. He pretended much anxiety for his fellow-citizens, but while he endeavoured to alarm their fears he was earnest for himself. He was a fitting agent of Satan, whose craft also was in danger, as it always is where the Gospel is faithfully preached; and consequently we continually find that if, in a parish or congregation, the truth of God begins to flourish, in a short time some enemy will rise or some event happen to mar its progress. But does persecution ever carry its end? Never; it always fails. Satan employs it as one of his chiefest instruments, *but over which the child of God eventually prevails, being*

'made 'more than conqueror through him who loved him,' and in the midst of the most agonizing tortures being enabled, by the upholding grace of God, to witness a good confession, and even to die triumphantly. The history of the Church of Christ in every age affords fearful details of the consequences of persecution. 'The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary one to the other,' says the Apostle; and this same warfare which the Christian maintains inwardly, is a true emblem of the bitter enmity that is felt by the unconverted against the humble believer. Cain murdered the holy Abel, Ishmael despised Isaac the child of promise, Esau caused Jacob to become a stranger in a distant land; while the 'patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt:' in short, were I to recount the sorrows of God's faithful people which are detailed in the Bible, I should occupy far too large a portion of our allotted time; how much more the cruel unrelenting hatred of the chief priests and rulers of the people against the Lord of life, and which he foretold to his disciples would be the case, for he said, 'The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord;' 'If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.' (Matt. x. 24; John xv. 20.)

"The outcry raised by Demetrius and his friends," said Mr. Lawrence, "reminds me of the present state of things with regard to Popery."

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "the priests and teachers of that sad faith begin to fear their craft is in danger, and that their crucifixes, and scapularies, and trash from which they hoped to reap such an abundant harvest, is likely, in Ireland at least, to prove a losing concern. May it prove equally so in this our loved country! I remember, some few months back, seeing an account of several cases of crucifixes, scapularies, relics, and other popish absurdities being brought from abroad, and landed at the Custom-house in London. No doubt the proprietors expected to reap a golden harvest when the day arrived that England would again become a popish country."

"Which may God of his infinite mercy grant may never happen," exclaimed Mr. Lawrence; "I have seen too much of it during my sojourn in foreign parts, and could give you such details of the superstition, ignorance, and infatuation of the people on the one hand, and the craftiness, bigotry, and soul-destroying actions of the priesthood on the other, as would amaze and grieve you."

"What do you mean by the scapularies, Mr. Lawrence?" said Hyford; "you have raised the old man's curiosity: the relics, too, I think you called them,—I must know, good sir, what they are, for I like to get to the bottom of things."

"Well, Master Hyford," replied Mr. Lawrence, smiling, "if our kind parson and friends will bear with me, I will just tell you a little about these wonderful things."

Hyford was in delight, he rubbed his hands, twinkled his eyes, and placed himself in an attitude of attention and curiosity.

"Fancy to yourself, Master Hyford," said Mr. Lawrence, addressing himself more particularly to the honest farmer, "fancy to yourself two bits of cloth, or linen, or any other stuff, about two inches square, one brown, the other red, with appropriate pictures on one side, and joined together by a ribbon or string, and hung from the neck as my spectacles are, and then you have a scapular."

"Well, sir, and what then?" said Hyford.

"Each scapular," proceeded Mr. Lawrence, "bears a different title, according to the order it represents: for instance, there is the Scapular of Mount Carmel, the Scapular of the Passion, and others. They are sold for fourpence each."

"And what are they for, sir?" said Hyford, whose curiosity was most amusing.

"They are used as a badge of religious brotherhood," answered Mr. Lawrence.

"I understand," interrupted the old man; "at elections, you know, we wear our badge, our colours; mine is always 'true blue.'"

"Quite right," replied Mr. Lawrence, laughing; "well, the scapularies are badges, to which miraculous powers are said to be attached, and the advantages attendant upon wearing them are considered innumerable; in fact, the Scapular of the Passion is declared to be a new method of salvation, and that whoever wears it shares the merits of the good works done by his brethren."

"How can people endowed with sense believe such nonsense?" exclaimed Hyford.

"The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them," (2 Cor. iv. 4,) solemnly replied Mr. Lawrence. "My very soul is grieved to think that such follies and iniquity should

find a resting-place in England. I happen to have a list in my pocket of the various prices of the appendages so highly prized by our poor Roman Catholic brethren, and which I think will remind you of Demetrius and his silver shrines." So saying, Mr. Lawrence opened a small book, from which he read the following: "'A beautiful image of St. Joseph, 14s. in coloured plaster; 17s. painted and gilt. Good strong beads for the poor, 1s. 2d. a dozen; the same in a nice red colour, 1s. 4d. a dozen. Rosaries of the seven dolours, very neat, 9d. each. Crucifixes at all prices: a very strong brass crucifix, 4d. An account of the Four Scapulars, with the Indulgence attached to them, 2d. each. Scapulars of all kinds, 1d. on linen, or 3s. 6d. a dozen.' Such, my dear friends, is the trash now exposed for sale in this country, and for which I grieve to say that a friend lately informed me there was such a demand, that in two days after the warehouse, as he called it, was opened, the whole stock was sold off, and orders given for many dozens more. He added that the profits could not be less than 90 per cent. No wonder, therefore, that our adversaries are using every effort, like the crafty old silversmith, to prevent their losing such means of gain."

"Well, sir," said Hyford, "you have given us a pretty good insight into the scapularies, as you call them; now please just to tell us what are the relics."

"They are," replied Mr. Lawrence, "the remains of the bodies and clothes of saints or martyrs, which have been carefully preserved, and are objects of worship. An arm-bone of one saint, the toe of another, the fingers of a third, have been preserved in gold and silver, and given to the misguided people to kiss; and I assure you the relics are a source of great profit to a Church whose grand object is the increase of wealth and worldly power. Many years ago, in the church of All Saints at Wittemberg, in Germany, was shown a fragment of Noah's ark, some *soot* from the furnace into which Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were cast, some hair from the beard of St. Christopher, and nineteen thousand other relics of greater or less value. My dear friends, it is needless for me to tell you more; you have heard enough to show you what kind of religion Popery is, and I must no longer interfere with the far more valuable instruction of your pastor, whom God has sent among you to speak forth the words of truth and soberness."

"Yours has been a sad but interesting detail," said Mr.

C——, “and the best possible commentary we could have upon our chapter. We can fancy that many a time have the priests of Rome met together, saying, ‘Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth, and if we permit the people to hear and read the Bible for themselves, they will discover that scapularies, and relicæ, and pilgrimages, and purgatory, and various other matters, which give us wealth and importance, are not to be found therein: let us therefore unite heart and hand to maintain our faith; and this can alone be done by keeping the multitude ignorant and dependent.’ Thus, my friends, has Rome argued, and thus she is filling up the measure of her iniquities, and preparing for those tremendous judgments which before long will descend upon her, for then ‘great Babylon will come in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.’” (Rev. xvi. 19.)

“Well, sir,” said Hyford, “between you and Mr. Lawrence we know more about Rome than ever we did; now, I wish you to tell us who was this Diana that these people made such a fuss about: it had nothing to do with the Virgin Mary, I suppose?”

“No,” replied Mr. C——, “and yet the events mentioned in our chapter have a strange resemblance to many things that have been enacted by the Church of Rome. Diana was in reality the moon, but worshipped by the heathen nations under various names, characters, and forms. In the city of Ephesus, where she was most highly valued, she was worshipped as the mother of mankind. The town-clerk, who came to quiet the people, (see verse 35,) reminds them that the image fell down from Jupiter; but truly he made a vast mistake, for it is well known by learned men that it was the work of a very famous ancient sculptor, named Canetias: and furthermore it seems to have been an ugly little statue, composed of several pieces of black wood, said to be ebony, or vine-wood, and that the story of its falling from heaven was invented by the priests to increase the number of worshippers, and consequently their own wealth and consequence. In like manner it is positively declared that the shrine of ‘Our Lady of Loretto,’ in Italy, that is, the Virgin Mary, in like manner came down from heaven; and it is well known that Pope John the First marched out of the city in solemn procession to receive a picture of the Virgin, which the credulous multitude were taught to believe was suspended in the air over the city for some time. Thus you see that there is a

near resemblance to the origin of the image of Diana of the Ephesians, and the shrine of 'Our Lady of Loretto;' and alas! the same spirit of darkness was the author of both deceptions. The confusion which arose in the city in consequence of the rage of Demetrius and his companions increased to an extreme height: the 'multitude caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, and rushed with one accord into the theatre,' where the public games were held, and where it is supposed they kept wild beasts for fighting, to which they purposed throwing these Christian men. When the Apostle was sensible of the danger of his friends, he desired to enter in unto the people; but 'the disciples suffered him not,' (verse 30,) for the excitement was so great that he might have been torn in pieces, and it was expected that by his absenting himself, the uproar would the more quickly subside. And so it proved; for after a time, like every public riot that occurs, the more part knew not wherefore they were come together, 'for some cried one thing, and some another.' At length a man named Alexander, a Jew, was put forward, and would have made his defence unto the people; but no sooner did the idolatrous mob discover what he was, than they determined not to hear him, but 'with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.'

"The tumult now had become serious, the fury of the multitude had arisen to an awful height, law and order seemed forgotten, and fearful violence might have been resorted to, had not the town-clerk, or recorder, the chief officer of the city, come forth, and with much cleverness allayed the tempest. 'Ye men of Ephesus,' said he, 'what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image that fell down from Jupiter? Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and do nothing rashly.' (Verses 35, 36.) Observe the prudent manner in which this magistrate addressed the angry multitude: though he humoured their foolish idea of the descent of their favourite image from heaven, it is doubtful whether he believed a word of it. Be that as it may, he tells them they 'ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly,' for in fact the strangers that had come amongst them were by no means such as Demetrius had endeavoured to represent: they were neither robbers of churches

nor yet blasphemers of their goddess. And this was true; Paul well knew that to preach against their precious idol would avail nothing, but, on the contrary, would drive his audience away. He therefore attacked the idol that reigned within, setting forth, as his Lord and Saviour had done before, that there was the seat of evil, the throne of Satan, and that being cleansed by the influence of the divine Spirit, they would cease to give their worship and service to a senseless idol. Thus the Apostle sets an example worthy of imitation to all ministers of the Gospel; and reminds me," added Mr. C——, "of a circumstance that occurred in the early life of one of our ablest preachers, and whose labours were eminently blest. He entered the Church with an ardent zeal for God, and was indefatigable in his duties: but, alas! though he toiled incessantly, he saw no fruit; his people were as dead, and cold, and worldly as ever, and at length he went to a friend who entered into his sorrows with the most heartfelt sympathy. 'What am I to do?' said the anxious youthful minister; 'I endeavour to be faithful, and warn my people, but they heed me not; I preach against the follies of the world, and its sinful pleasures, and I suppose they do not believe me, for not one is a whit less worldly than heretofore,—in fact, I think some are worse.' 'Well then,' said the old practical minister, 'try another method: preach Christ to them, Christ in all his fulness as their Redeemer; tell them that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;" (2 Cor. v. 19;) tell them that "He is their wisdom, their righteousness, their sanctification, and redemption;" and that he freely invites all to come to him, declaring that none shall be rejected: preach Christ, my young friend, and then come and tell me the result.' He did so; he simply set forth the love of God as revealed in the Gospel; he led them to Jesus, the 'Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world;' he put good works in their right place, even as the *fruits* of faith; and soon he experienced the fulfilment of the promise that God's word should 'not return unto him void, but should accomplish that which he should please, and prosper in the thing whereto he sent it.' The idols that his people had set up in their hearts to worship were cast down, for as one after another was led by the regenerating grace of the Lord the Spirit, they quickly discovered they could not serve God and mammon, and that the friend of the world is the enemy of God. Oh!

with what different feelings did the pastor again visit his aged friend, and how they rejoiced together over those objects committed to their charge, who had become their joy and crown.

"We hear no more of Demetrius and his companions. The wise and prudent speech of the town-clerk allayed the popular fury; the people began to feel that they had not only acted hastily, but had incurred a chance of being called in question for that day's uproar, and that were such the case, they had no cause whereby in their own vindication they could give an account of such an assemblage, or of the earnestness wherewith they pleaded the sanctity of their favourite deity. By such arguments as these peace was restored, and by degrees the foolish people returned to their homes and respective business; teaching us that 'there is nothing new under the sun, for the thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done,' (Eccles. i. 9;) and therefore even with regard to multitudes collecting for uproar and confusion, we have but to open our Bibles and see the same occurring at Ephesus, and recorded for the purpose of teaching us the folly of such proceeding, and its violation of the divine command, 'to study to be quiet, and mind our own business,' for the God whom we serve is a God of order, of peace, and love.

"Important as the city of Ephesus was at the time we are considering, it is now in such complete ruins, that in 1835 a traveller who visited it states, 'that it is a dreary uncultivated spot: a few corn-fields were scattered along the site of the ancient city, which is marked by some large stones indicating walls and ruins.' Other travellers visited it in 1826; they record that corn was growing amidst the ruins, and only one solitary Christian was to be found. In our following chapter we shall be led to consider the cause why such a fearful desolation has overwhelmed her, and why a city, once so renowned, should be reduced to a ruinous heap. In St. John's time it was the first of the Christian churches in Asia: now, alas! her candlestick has been removed out of her place, and is nowhere to be found; affording to us another proof of the faithfulness of God's word,—'Them that honour me I will honour, but they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.' (1 Sam. ii. 30.) Yes, thus it was with Ephesus, and thus it will be with every nation, and town, and parish, and person, to the end of time. As long as all are governed by the love of God,

as long as He is cherished amongst us, his Gospel prized, his laws observed, his day honoured, his presence regarded, so long all will go well with us, we shall be the first among the nations, prosperity will dwell in our towns, contentment in our parishes, and domestic happiness and peace in our dwellings, and in our own individual experience. But reverse the picture: let us say, 'By my power, and might, and industry, I have attained this high estate,' then wait a little for what will follow. 'The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day;' for truly it 'is by righteousness that a nation or an individual are exalted and stand, and it is by sin they equally descend into forgetfulness and the tomb.' The chapter we have read has given subject for much reflection. May the Lord condescend to bless it, and may you be led more and more to consider the fearful apostasy of Rome from the truth of the living God, and may He of his infinite mercy daily call out of her soul-destroying communion such as shall be saved.

No. 59. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,
AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

Paul's Departure from Ephesus.



LONDON:
HOULSTON AND STONEMAN,
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1852.

THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

“How often I have thought of our last chapter, sir,” said farmer Hyford to Mr. C——, when they were once more assembled at M—— Court; “not so much of the uproar occasioned by the preaching of St. Paul, as of the likeness between the wares of the silversmith, and those of the Popish priests. I had no idea of such things before; and truly they will have a fearful account to give at the last day, of the awful number of souls they have led to destruction. The heathen were to be pitied; they had no Bible, they knew nothing of God, and had no means of learning anything about him; but the Popish priests—oh, sir, I am thinking they sin wilfully against light and knowledge; they persist in shutting their eyes to what is right, and, for the sake of power and love of money, are willing to sell their immortal souls. From my heart I pity them; I recollect the time when I was as ignorant and careless about heavenly things as possible, and, now that I know the value of my own soul, I think of the value of others, and my heart aches for the poor blind creatures who are falling into everlasting misery themselves and dragging multitudes in with them. Can nothing be done for them? The Pope, too, miserable old man, he has a soul to be saved; and though he may be called ‘His Holiness,’ unless he discovers that he is vile and sinful, I fear his fine title will go for nothing in that day when Pope and Pagan must stand before God.”

“Alas!” replied Mr. C——, “the Pope is the head of a false religion, which has earthly power for its object, while ignorance and superstition are its supporters on the one side, and force and fraud on the other. I have often thought with you, Mr. Hyford, that the Pope is spoken of and regarded merely as a head, a chief leader, the ruler of a religious party, but nothing beyond it; while of his fearful state before God none seem to think. But yet he has a soul, a never-dying soul, and oh! how sad to ponder

upon what may be its future lot. His life, his actions, his words are directly opposed to God, and, as St. Paul says, 'he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.' (2 Thess. ii. 4.) He even 'opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped.' (2 Thess. ii. 4.)"

"How do you mean, sir?" said a gentlemanly looking young man, who had been introduced to Mr. C—— as Mr. Wakefield; "you advance bold doctrines." Mr. C—— looked surprised, while Mr. Lawrence smiled, and gave him a look of peculiar meaning.

"I never," replied the pastor, mildly, "advance a doctrine, sir, that I cannot support by the word of God. Human teaching is subject to error, but the word of Jehovah shall stand for ever, based on eternal truth, even as his throne, which can never be moved. I said in the words of the apostle Paul, that the Pope sitting in the temple of God opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God. I happen to have a book at hand, wherein are given directions how to act whenever a new Pope is chosen; it says: 'After the Pope's election and proclamation, the Pope, attired in his pontifical dress, is borne to the church of St. Peter, and there placed upon the high altar, where the cardinals, for the third time, kiss his hand, his foot, and his mouth, and in the meantime the people sing, "We praise thee, O God, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord;" and when the *adoration*, that is, worship, is over, the Pope then descends from the altar.'

"That was formerly the custom," remarked Mr. Wakefield, "but not of late years."

"Pardon me," replied Mr. C——; "the same observances were followed when the present Pope, Pius IX., was consecrated. The newspapers of the date of June 17, 1840, will inform you that on that day he appeared at St. Peter's to receive the *adoration* of the cardinals; he then seated himself upon the altar, where he received their second adoration; and while the choristers were chanting, 'Behold the great high-priest,' a title that belongs to Jesus Christ alone, he was carried to the high altar, where for a third time he was worshipped. Again, let me notice the tiara, or crown composed of three crowns."

"What, sir!" exclaimed Hyford, "three crowns! What can he do with them? does he wear them all at the same time?"

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, smiling; "and he manages it very well too: it is a cap composed of three crowns, one above the other."

"What kingdoms do they represent?" demanded the inquisitive farmer.

"Some say, heaven, earth, and hell, or rather, purgatory," answered Mr. C——; "be it as it may, the words used when the crown is placed on his head are, 'Receive thou the tiara adorned with three crowns, in token that thou art the father of princes and kings, the governor of the world, the vicar of our Saviour Jesus Christ upon earth, to whom be glory and honour, for ever and ever, Amen.' Surely then," added Mr. C——, "the acts of the Pope prove the truth of the Apostle's words, namely, that he 'exalteth himself above all that is called God.' I must not take up the time usually allotted to our chapter by adding much more," continued Mr. C——; "but the sympathy expressed for the soul of the Pope by our worthy friend has induced me to enter into it, and before we dismiss it altogether we will just notice a few things equally sad, and destructive of every truth. All Roman Catholics are taught that the Pope is head of the Church, and cannot do wrong: that he has full power to retain or forgive sins: that he may alter the Scripture, God's holy word, as he pleases: and that he ought to be honoured and obeyed even as Jesus Christ himself. On the 21st of last month, (September, 1851,) we are told by the newspaper, (the *Giornale di Roma*,) that the ceremony of the beatification of Father Claver (known by the name of the Venerable Father Pietro Claver, a Jesuit, surnamed the Apostle of the Moors,) took place."

"Beatification, sir, what is that?" said Hyford; "some new folly, I suppose."

"You may well say so," replied Mr. C——; "it means that the Pope is so sure that Father Claver has entitled himself to a place in heaven by his good works, that he is from henceforth to be added to the number of saints, and consequently worshipped."

"Please to go on, sir, this is something new;" said Hyford.

"Alas! not so," replied Mr. C——, "in that apostate church; but I mention it in order to show that the same mummary and priestcraft is being carried on in our day even as heretofore, and that the Church of Rome will ever continue the same, sinning against light and knowledge."

Now listen :—on the appointed day the church of the Vatican, that is, the palace wherein the Pope lives, was adorned with red damask hangings, and two altars had been erected with paintings representing two miracles performed by the venerable father. After the declaration of his blessed state had been read, a solemn ‘*Te Deum*’ was sung, and amidst the thunder of cannons the statue or image of the saint was uncovered, and in the evening the Pope and cardinals proceeded to worship him. Surely this fact proves how completely the god of this world has blinded the minds of those unhappy professors, that while they call themselves Christians, in thought, word, and deed they deny the Saviour, and are heaping upon themselves and followers swift destruction ; for the Apostle declares that that ‘*Wicked*,’ which means the Papacy, shall be consumed by the Lord ‘with the spirit of his mouth, and destroyed by the brightness of his coming.’ (2 Thess. ii. 8.)”

During the whole of Mr. C——’s address, Mr. Wakefield appeared much interested, and deep in thought ; he made no remark, but was observed to note the passages in the New Testament referred to by the Pastor, and to look as if new ideas were occupying his mind.

“We must lay aside this interesting subject,” continued Mr. C—— ; “not entirely, indeed, but for the present, while we proceed to notice the further transactions of the Apostle, who, after the uproar caused by Demetrius and his companion had ceased, thought it prudent to depart from Ephesus, and accordingly again visited Macedonia with the towns of Philippi and Thessalonica, where he earnestly exhorted his people to give all diligence to make their calling and election sure. At length he came to Troas, where he was joined by some of the brethren, and as the expression *we* is made use of in the 6th verse, it is naturally concluded that St. Luke, who wrote the Acts of the Apostles, was of the number. ‘And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow ; and continued his speech until midnight. And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together.’ (Acts xx. 7, 8.) It was the custom in the early ages of the Gospel for the brethren to join together, every Sabbath day, in celebrating the Holy Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Thus they kept up a continual remembrance of the great atonement offered by the Redeemer, together with an abiding feeling of love

and charity towards each other; the peace of God ruled in their hearts, and the precepts of the Gospel influenced their lives, so that their days were spent in anticipation of that bright and glorious time when they should be with Him, 'in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore.'

"Was there any reason for speaking of the upper chamber being well lighted?" asked Mrs. Basil; "I suspect there was, though I confess I do not see it."

"The Holy Spirit," replied Mr. C——, "never has dictated a sentence in this heavenly book without design; all is for us to notice and derive profit: this circumstance by many readers would be unnoticed, but it carries much significant meaning with it, and is recorded in order to defeat the vile accusations of the enemies of the Gospel, who upbraided the Christians with holding their meetings in the dark. By well lighting the room appropriated to their holy assemblies, they guarded against all appearance of evil, and prevented their good being evil spoken of. 'And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead.' (Verse 9.) When the Apostle began his discourse is not recorded, but it was evidently very long: he had much to say; he felt it more than probable he would never meet them again in the body, and his heart was full. They were his beloved in the Lord, the precious seals to his ministry; one subject after another crowded upon his mind, and he desired to confirm and strengthen them in the faith they had embraced. The preacher never wearied, the listeners hearkened as for eternity; they likewise felt it the solemn farewell discourse, and they hung upon his words: but there was one in that assembly whose attention drooped, and who, overcome by sleep, fell out of the window where he had been sitting into the court below, and was taken up dead. You must recollect there were no windows of glass, for at that time that beautiful article was unknown; it was in reality an open doorway reaching to the floor, and therefore a likely place to produce such an accident. No sooner had it occurred, than 'Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him;' this not a little comforted the assembly, who had the satisfaction of seeing him restored to health; and therefore

could with renewed gratitude unite in the religious services they were engaged in, and freely converse with their beloved teacher and friend, who continued warning, counselling, and exhorting, even until break of day."

"Well, sir," said Hyford, "I confess I do not wonder at the poor young man falling asleep; it seems to have been a very long sermon, and you know, sir, on such occasions it is very hard to keep awake."

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, with a smile, "I am aware of it; but though we try to find an excuse for doing so, it does not render the act less sinful. To sleep while listening to God's word is a sign of having but little interest in it, and consequently obtaining no advantage. This history of Eutychus is recorded for our warning. My dear friends, I know that some make a practice of sleeping during the sermon, they regularly settle themselves for it, and take no pains to endeavour to resist the inclination. This is sinful, decidedly so: it is putting contempt upon the message of mercy and love sent by heaven's Almighty King to his rebellious creatures. What would you say to that man who was honoured with a letter from the Queen, and over which he fell asleep? And where is the difference? Our letter is from the King of kings and Lord of lords, a letter offering such terms of love and glory that no earthly monarch can come near to it; and yet you sleep over it, you treat it with contempt, you show by your actions that it bears no value in your sight. Oh! resist all temptations to sin; you cannot do so in your own strength, but if you have to contend with a drowsy temperament, take it as a cross to the throne of grace, and implore the Divine assistance to enable you to overcome it. Nothing is more common than for persons to fall asleep during Divine service; there is scarcely a congregation where the minister is not distressed by the sight; and I well remember once hearing of a person who so far forgot himself as to breathe loud enough to disturb the people, and at length call forth the attention of the preacher, who stopped in his discourse, looked full into the pew where the man was snoring, and when he saw him rouse from his state of insensibility, thundered out the words, 'Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.' (Eph. v. 14.) And this was applicable in a twofold sense: sleep is the image of death, and death is an emblem of that state of insensibility wherein the unregenerate live, they are 'dead in

trespasses and sins.' (Eph. iii. 5.) As far as this world, and their employments and pursuits and objects go, they may be full of life; but in the concerns of their immortal souls, in the things of eternity, in that earnest longing after holiness, they are as dead, as insensible as the man who is laid in his grave, unmoved and unaffected by all around him. This is spiritual death, and, alas! the fearful state of thousands. Eutychus slept while the Apostle was proclaiming mercy and forgiveness, and his sinful sleep became the sleep of death; but again he was roused, again he was restored to life and consciousness, and again he heard the Gospel of salvation. This may resemble those who are graciously enabled to hear the sound of mercy, and to wake from their stupor—they obey the voice that alone can rouse them, and rise to life, light, and immortality. But the dead—how can I describe them? and yet I dare not pass over their fearful state—beware that its description does not apply to you. Think of a person who hears of the glories of heaven, of the miseries of hell, of eternally enjoying that bliss which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart to conceive, and of that woe which for ever shuts out hope and peace, and where the smoke of its torment ascends for ever and ever, and can still be perfectly insensible to either, and you behold a creature spiritually dead."

"Yes, sir," said Hyford, rising from his seat, "and that was my state for years. I valued not heaven, I cared nothing for hell, I went to church, I repeated the Creed and followed in the prayers; I asked for mercy after each commandment without a thought—indeed, in my opinion I had kept them all, but I did it as a thing of course, and it was easy to say, 'Lord, have mercy on me, and incline my heart to keep thy law;' whereas, if I had been asked, I should have declared with the young man in the Gospel, 'All these have I kept from my youth up.' I could say, 'Lord, Lord,' and have the character of being a worthy, respectable man, and yet, I tremble to think of it, had I been taken hence at that time, I should now be gnashing my teeth with anguish, vexation, and remorse. Oh, sir! a Christian in name and a Christian in reality are two very different things: don't you think so?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Mr. C——. "As I walk along, all I meet call themselves Christians; but are they so in reality? The Searcher of hearts alone can answer the question; it is His Spirit only that can make them so;

it is the Divine power that must endow them with life and vigour. But to return to our chapter: after the restoration of Eutychus, the Apostle continued exhorting and discoursing with the disciples; he had much to say, for he felt it was the last time he should be amongst them. They consequently cared not to separate, and therefore he continued speaking until break of day, when he met by appointment St. Luke and his friends at Assos, a seaport town on the south coast of Troas, in Mysia, celebrated by ancient writers for a kind of stone of such a nature, that dead bodies put into coffins composed of it, were consumed in forty days all but the teeth. On this account it was called *sarcophagus*, the 'flesh-devourer.' At last they arrived at Miletus, a place now in ruins, and called Melas by the Turks; there Paul rested, and sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church which he had planted, that he might give them instructions how to proceed in the great work he had begun in that city. The church of Ephesus was the first of the seven churches in Asia spoken of in the Revelation. She had a message sent to her by Him who liveth and was dead, and is alive for evermore, and if you look into the chapter you will learn why Ephesus is desolate, and, as I told you before, nothing is now to be seen but shapeless ruins and stone walls. (See Rev. ii. 1—7.) When Paul was there, he told them he kept back nothing that was profitable unto them, but taught them publicly, and from house to house, 'testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.' (Acts xx. 20, 21.) Observe here Paul's diligence in the performance of his duties; he taught publicly in the synagogues, and in places of daily concourse, and privately from house to house, and this is conduct worthy of imitation; the more I see of human nature, the more deeply I am impressed with the importance of the minister of Christ enforcing in private what he teaches in public."

"I believe it," interrupted Mr. Lawrence; "a person with little education cannot follow the rapidity with which a preacher treats his subject; he picks up a little here and there if he listens with much attention, but his progress is slow; whereas, when the same doctrines are treated of in his own house, and he feels at liberty to ask his pastor to explain *this* better, and make *that* plainer, it is wonderful the rapidity with which he learns, and the

increased pleasure with which he listens to the preached word."

"We have a proof of that in this parish, sir," said Hyford; "our kind parson here does not take his ease, and think Sunday his only working day: no, he goes from house to house; the people listen with delight; I know that they read their Bible with pleasure, for they tell me when they meet with a difficulty they mark it, in order to ask Mr. C—— to explain it; and thus more good has been done here of late years than ever was known before, and the blessing of God seems to rest upon us."

"The doctrine the Apostle preached," resumed Mr. C——, "was repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ; which is, in fact, the substance of Christianity, for we must come to God with a deep sense of sin, feeling that it can alone be pardoned and washed away by the blood of the Divine Redeemer. Having thus borne testimony to his doctrine, he adverts to himself, saying, 'And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.' (Verses 22, 23.) Observe this: he felt obliged to go to Jerusalem, his duty called him thither, and he hasted to go, though he felt certain that troubles awaited him on account of his religion. He understood nothing of their nature, all he knew was that they would come. It is well for us that we have no knowledge of the future! Were we to be aware of what is before us, life would be often miserable. It is in mercy our heavenly Father has concealed from us the future, and though we may often be compared to persons groping in the dark, still the child of God would not have it otherwise; satisfied with his heavenly Father's promises, assured of the unchangeableness of his love, sensible of his greatness, encouraged by his condescension, and confident in his compassion, he casts himself and all his cares, his anxieties, his trials and difficulties at his footstool, and prays him to guide him by his counsel, and afterward to receive him to glory. And what effect has this simple dependence upon the believer's mind? It produces peace. Yes, my dear friends, a peace that the world cannot give nor take away; a perfect peace, (see Isa. xxvi. 3,) a peace that passeth all understanding, which cannot be explained, but which is felt and experienced by all those happy ones

who rest upon the Lord Jehovah, and make him their strength and their salvation. Every portion of this parting address of the Apostle is deeply interesting and affecting : time will not permit us to dwell minutely upon it, but I would call your attention particularly to the twenty-eighth verse, as being of the utmost interest and importance. 'Take heed,' he says to the pastors that surrounded him, 'Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.' Oh ! how completely this shows God and Man to be one Christ ; how gloriously it sets forth his love, his power, his willingness to save. The Church of God : what is it ? It is, my hearers, a 'multitude that no man can number, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation : ' it is the whole family of the redeemed in heaven and on earth, who have been 'washed, and sanctified, and justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God : ' they are those who take God for their Father, Christ for their Saviour, the Spirit for their Sanctifier : who believe God's word, who lean solely and entirely upon the Redeemer's sacrifice and atonement, who follow after holiness, who obey the commandments of their Lord, and whose life is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit ; such is the Church : and now, where is it ? Blessed be God, it is scattered throughout the whole world : from Greenland's icy mountains to India's burning shores, it is wherever two or three are gathered together in the Saviour's name. Yes, my dear friends, this is the Church of God, redeemed by his blood, and to purchase which he veiled himself in humanity, that so he might bear the sins of many, and 'through death destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.' (Heb. ii. 14.) Oh ! may we who are called to the ministry, diligently feed our flocks upon these precious truths, leading them at once to their Saviour, and teaching them plainly that there is salvation in none other, and that there is 'no other name under heaven given amongst men, whereby they can be saved.' In the spirit of prophecy the Apostle warns his hearers of those false teachers who should hereafter arise, and draw away disciples after them ; who should speak perverse things, whereby the church of Ephesus would leave 'her first love,' (see Rev. ii. 4,) that is, decline in religious zeal and fervour, and would cause her to entirely lose her place

among the churches. This was literally fulfilled; between false teachers on the one hand, and the power of the Roman sword on the other, she at length gave way, and now, not a single Christian dwells upon the spot. What a warning to ourselves! May we give diligence to be found in Jesus without spot and blameless, lest our hearts being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, we should fall from our own steadfastness, and no longer be the people and the land wherein the Lord delighteth."

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TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,
AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

Paul before Felix.



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THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

"THE latter part of the Acts of the Apostles," observed Mr. C——, "being devoted to the labours of St. Paul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles, we are of necessity obliged to follow him in all his journeyings. I would endeavour to avoid being tedious; at the same time every chapter in the book before us contains so much that is both valuable and interesting, that I hardly know how to pass any over in silence. The beautiful address he gave to the elders of the Ephesian Church was closed with prayer; he commended his beloved brethren to God, and to the word of his grace, and then hastened on the voyage he felt it his duty to undertake. The Spirit of God appeared to lead him to Jerusalem, though his friends did all they could to dissuade him from going thither: one after another foretold that bonds and afflictions awaited him, to which he only replied, 'What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.' (Chap. xxi. 13.) Here was the courage and devotion of the Christian united with the ardent affection of a friend and brother; he loved his people with the deepest sincerity, but he loved his Saviour more; his cause was dear unto him, and wherever the path of duty led, there he was ready to walk, although it might be contrary to his inclination or pleasure.

"At length he arrived at Jerusalem, and in a very few days experienced the truth of those prophécies that had been uttered on his behalf. Like the Ephesians, in their wild zeal for their goddess Diana, the Jews in Jerusalem took offence at seeing the Apostle in company with a friend whom they supposed he had brought into the temple, and thus polluted the holy place. Therefore,

without making any inquiry into the matter, 'they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple,' and shut the doors, lest it should be defiled with his blood; for it appears they determined to kill him, and no doubt would have effected their purpose, had not the chief captain rescued him out of their hands. Finding the popular fury so violent, he quickly supposed the Apostle had caused it by his conduct, and after binding him with two chains, was going to order him to be imprisoned in the Castle Antonia, when he demanded permission to say a word in his own defence. This request, being made in the Greek language, perplexed the magistrate, who wondered at his thus addressing him, and replied, 'Canst thou speak Greek? Art thou not that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?' (Chap. xxi. 38.) Upon which the Apostle soon undeceived him, and replied, 'I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city.'

"Who was the Egyptian they spoke of, sir?" said Mr. Hill.

"He was an Egyptian Jew," replied Mr. C——, "who about that time came into Judea, and giving out that he was a prophet, collected in the desert about 30,000 people, whom he persuaded to follow him to the Mount of Olives, from whence he told them they should behold the walls of Jerusalem fall down at his command, and then he would lead them into the city."

"What was his object?" inquired Mrs. Basil, "did he wish to assume the government of the city?"

"Yes, madam," replied the pastor, "his object was to take the city by force, seize the Roman garrison, and then get himself proclaimed governor. But the Roman governor, Felix, of whom I purpose saying much by-and-by, summoned his troops, and in a short time defeated him; some of his followers were killed, others taken prisoners, and the Egyptian himself fled with some of those who remained faithful to him. As these events had happened only two years before, and the rebel was known to be alive, the chief captain Lysias naturally concluded that the uproar he had just checked was caused by him, and consequently must have felt great satisfaction in the peaceable account St. Paul gave of himself. 'Men, brethren, and fathers,' he exclaimed, 'hear ye my defence, which I make now unto you.' (Chap. xxii. 1.)

“ These words, being spoken in the Hebrew language, at once arrested the attention of the multitude, and for a considerable time they listened to the details of his miraculous conversion, until he proceeded to declare his mission to the Gentiles. This roused their indignation and self-esteem, and the idea of their being fellow-heirs of eternal life so enraged them, that, wild with fury and bigotry, ‘ they lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth : for it is not fit that he should live.’ (Verse 22.) Again the Roman officer had to interfere to save his life; and now, judging from the behaviour of the people that he must certainly have been a notorious offender, took him into custody, and ordered that he should be examined by scourging ; expecting, according to the manner and custom of the times, that the torture would induce him to confess his guilt. Shame, torture, stoning, persecution in any shape, the undaunted Apostle was ready to endure, if necessary, for his beloved Master’s sake ; but in this instance he felt himself called upon to remonstrate, and therefore said to the centurion who was superintending the execution of the barbarous sentence : ‘ Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned ?’ (Verse 25.) This was sufficient ; it was contrary to law to beat a Roman citizen, and the Apostle laid hold of it. The chief captain, therefore, afraid of being called to account for its violation, gladly gave the captive liberty, and commanded him the next day to appear before the Sanhedrim, or Jewish council, whereof the High Priest was chief. No sooner had the Apostle begun his defence, than the ‘ High Priest Ananias commanded them that stood by to smite him on the mouth ;’ a punishment used in the East at this day, when a person says anything displeasing to those in authority. Immediately, in the spirit of prophecy, the Apostle exclaimed, ‘ God shall smite thee, thou whited wall ;’ which was truly fulfilled : for about five years after this, a son of this very Ananias put himself at the head of a party of incendiaries, who took possession of the temple, and being joined by a band of murderers, committed such violence in the miserable city, that the great and noble hid themselves wherever they could. Ananias and his brother Hezekiah sought shelter under an old aqueduct, but were discovered, dragged from the spot, and quickly dispatched. Such is the account given by the Jewish historian of this unworthy

and hypocritical High Priest. In a short time, the words, of Paul set the council quarrelling between themselves, and in order to save his life, the chief captain, Lysias, was again obliged to interfere, and, under cover of the night, sent him out of Jerusalem well guarded to Cæsarea, where Felix, the governor of the province, resided, and to whom he wrote a letter, informing him of the recent events that had taken place.

“Thus, my dear friends,” continued Mr. C——, “I have hastily glanced at the 21st, 22d, and 23d chapters of the Acts, in order to carry the history of Paul down to the period of which I wish to speak more particularly ; namely, when he is brought before Felix. This man was originally a slave of Claudius, the Roman emperor, and, with his brother Pallas, was made free, and rewarded with the government of Judea. But he was totally unfit for such a responsible situation ; for he ‘exercised the authority of a king with the mind of a slave,’ and was so bad a character, that he was a torment everywhere. Such was Felix, the man before whom the great Apostle of the Gentiles was to plead, and whom he was to address with an earnestness and solemnity that terrified him on his regal chair. When Ananias and his party had discovered that Paul had escaped, and was actually at Cæsarea, they also hastened thither, accompanied by a celebrated orator named Tertullus, who was a Roman, and as you may suppose, very willing to undertake the accusation of the captive. Considering, as I said before, the bad character of the governor, we turn with disgust from the flatteries of this man, who spoke of the great quietness they enjoyed and worthy deeds he performed, as if he were one of the most perfect of mankind. He then proceeds to abuse the Apostle, styling him a ‘pestilent fellow,’ ‘a mover of sedition,’ and ‘a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes,’ by which he meant the followers of Jesus, who were continually declared to be disaffected subjects of Rome, and disturbers of the peace. The Apostle permitted him to complete his accusation, and then with all the dignity of innocence, and the conscious integrity of the Christian, he proceeded to refute every charge. ‘Forasmuch,’ he said, ‘as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself.’ (Chap. xxiv. 10. During the past seven years Felix had been governor, and had become well acquainted with the nature and character of

the Jews ; he was aware of their self-righteous bigotry, which would lead them into any lengths of violence and injustice, therefore he was quite willing to give a patient hearing to all that the Apostle had to say in his defence. He states that he arrived in Jerusalem for the purpose of worship, that there he acted peaceably and quietly, that he worshipped 'the God of his fathers, believing all things which are written in the law, and in the prophets : ' thus at once appealing to the Scriptures as the foundation of his religion, and rejoicing in the hope of a future resurrection.

" Here I would pause for a moment," said Mr. C——, laying down his book, "while I call your attention to the character given of those who shall rise again. 'The just and unjust,' says St. Paul. Yes, my hearers, the day is coming, 'when all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth ; ' when the holy and unholy, the sanctified and unsanctified, the believer and the unbeliever, shall stand before Jesus, the Judge of the world, and receive their sentence according to the deeds done in the body. This great and mighty doctrine is so frequently set forth, that many treat it with careless indifference ; they hear of the Resurrection, but forget that they have in it a deep, individual interest. Oh ! if they did but consider that 'now is the accepted time,' now only is the day of salvation,—that, as death leaves us, so judgment will find us,—that

' There's no repentance in the grave,
Nor pardon offer'd to the dead,'—

surely they would, we should think, be more anxious to give all diligence to make their calling and election sure. But unbelief, the sin of Paradise, is the impediment here also ; people are too often satisfied either that they are no worse than their neighbours, or that they are sure all will be right hereafter. Hence that carelessness, lukewarmness, and backwardness to their spiritual concerns. I tremble to think of the probable fate of many who have borne the name of Christian, but of whom the Bible exclaims, ' Yet are dead ! '—a state which is fitly typified by that total insensibility which accompanies the human corpse, and which can alone be awoken by the vivifying influences of the Spirit from on high. But what says the Apostle with regard to himself ? ' Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward

God, and toward men,' (verse 16;) that is, believing all things which were written in the law and in the prophets, and having hope towards God, he continually and diligently laboured to perform his duty, and to act in such a holy, upright, and consistent manner as became a professed disciple of the Lord Jesus. The desire of Paul is that of every sincere Christian, whose wish and constant endeavour is, to act according to the word and will of his heavenly Father in all things, well knowing that there is no use in crying, 'Lord, Lord,' and yet in works denying him. A real Christian cannot hide himself: if a person sincerely loves his Saviour, he must show it; his life and conduct will give evidence of it, and 'he will be like a tree planted by the river of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season.' This simple truth was plainly declared by our Lord, who said, 'Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves;' and mark what follows,— 'Ye shall know them by their fruits.' (Matt. vii. 15, 16.) Yes, as a good well-grafted stock produces good fruit, so does he whose heart is renewed and cleansed by the Spirit show by his life and conversation that he is a real Christian; while, on the contrary, however speciously people may act and play the hypocrite, the hour of trial proves that their religion was mere pretence, and their profession 'as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.' (1 Cor. xiii. 1.) I am the more earnest upon this matter, because this is the day of profession; religion of some kind or another is the constant theme; young and old, high and low, are contending for principles and opinions which are too often based upon wrong premises, and the pure, holy precepts of God's word are exchanged for the vain empty theories of man's invention. I entreat you, hold fast your Bible, and let it be as a lamp unto your feet, and a light unto your paths, and then you are certain to attain eternal life. It leads you directly to your Saviour, and teaches you that his blood can cleanse your soul from its awful defilements; that in your daily life you must maintain a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards man, and that, assisted by the Lord the Spirit, you must not shrink from your appointed trials; but will, like a gallant soldier, 'fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, and profess a good profession before many witnesses.' (See 1 Tim. vi. 12.)"

"Ay, sir," said Hyford, "that's it; I love to see a

person out and out what he professes to be : I hate pretence in any shape, and yet I believe there are many pretended Christians."

"I fear there may be," replied Mr. C——; "but with such, you and I, Mr. Hyford, have nothing to do; let us never forget that it is written, 'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.' Yes, truly, our path to Zion is very narrow, and owing to the sin that dwelleth in us we are always ready to turn to the right hand or the left; if, therefore, we are ever steady and consistent at all, it is because the arm of Omnipotence has upheld us, and He has enabled us to maintain the profession of our faith without wavering. After the Apostle had declared his watchfulness over his daily walk and conduct; he proceeded to narrate why he saw fit to visit Jerusalem. He came, he said, 'to bring alms to his nation,' for the brethren of Macedonia and Achaia had made a collection for the 'poor saints' dwelling there, and entrusted him with its distribution; while on his own account he had oblations to offer at the temple. It was, therefore, both absurd and unjust to impute this to him as a crime; and he told them that they had nothing to lay to his charge except his endeavouring to establish the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead."

"But I thought the Jews believed in the Resurrection," observed Miss Walters.

"The greater part of them did so," replied Mr. C——, "but the sect of the Sadducees rejected it; they imagined that the soul was mortal as well as the body, and consequently perished with it, while they also denied the existence of angel or spirit. Alas! it was a dark miserable faith, presenting a gloomy contrast to the Christian, who has hope in his death, who forgets the sorrows and afflictions of life as he presses forward to attain his prize of immortality, and lay hold of that bright crown of glory which the blood of his Redeemer has purchased for him. Well might Paul rejoice in the doctrine of the resurrection; it cheered his painful path, it gilded his hours of trial with many a precious ray. In 1 Cor. xv. he declares that 'if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is not Christ risen: and if he be not raised, our faith is vain; we are yet in our sins;' adding, 'If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.' Oh! if he had stopped there, and left us full of the doubts and apprehensions these words were

calculated to convey, how deeply we should have deplored it ! But no ; Paul spake by the influence of the Spirit, and, through the goodness of God, not one doctrine necessary to our happiness is left uncertain. Hence we find him triumphantly exclaiming, ' But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.' And it was this great and glorious theme he proclaimed to the ignorant heathen, Felix, who for the first time in his life heard the everlasting Gospel faithfully and boldly preached. 'Tis true, that he knew more of the Christians, as a sect or party, than the chief captain Lysias, and to this may be attributed the favour with which he regarded his captive ; and that while he would not positively offend the Jews by releasing him, he showed him kindness, for he allowed him more liberty than he had before, and commanded that whoever wished to visit him might be admitted. If we refer to the sacred text, it appears that after this matter was so far arranged, the governor left Cæsarea for a time, and upon his return, accompanied by his wife Drusilla, 'sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.' (Verse 24.)"

" Was his wife a good woman, sir ?" said Hyford.

" Certainly not," replied Mr. C—— ; " I should say she was quite the reverse ; but you shall judge for yourself, when I have told you more about her. She was the daughter of that Herod Agrippa who beheaded James the brother of John, (see Acts xii. 1, 2,) and who was struck with the dreadful disease mentioned in the 23d verse of the same chapter. She was exceedingly beautiful, and married to Azizus, king of Emesus, but afterwards forsook him for the sake of Felix, by whom she had one son, who, it is said, perished with her in an eruption of Mount Vesuvius, in the reign of Titus. It was before her and Felix the Apostle fearlessly stood, and declared his mighty message. ' And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time ; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.' (Verse 25.) Well might the wicked Roman governor tremble ! Paul attacked his dearest passions ; he showed him that ' without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' As a heathen, Felix had never heard doctrine of this character before ; the religion he had hitherto professed taught him

to eat and drink, and enjoy life in whatever way was the most agreeable. He never heard of denying himself, and taking up his cross ; with inward heart-holiness he was totally unacquainted ; but Paul talked to him of righteousness,—he set forth a just, and pure, and holy God. Oh ! how totally opposite to the deities of Rome ! He opened to him the future, that great and mighty future ! so awful, yet so glorious ; so dreadful to the profligate sinner, so joyous in anticipation to the redeemed saint. ‘ Judgment to come ; ’ what must Felix have felt ! In his capacity of judge he could follow the view opened by his inspired teacher of the great day of assize ; he had judged, had condemned many, but now in his turn he saw himself tried before another tribunal, his secret acts made known, his ambition, his profligacy, his cruelties, all exposed. And he trembled. The awful future seemed already present ; and for the first time in all probability he quailed before his prisoner. But did it produce repentance, did it lead him to cry out, ‘ What must I do to be saved ? ’ Alas ! no : we can scarcely believe the deadness and stupidity of the man as we read his reply,—‘ Go thy way for this time ; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.’ (Verse 25.)”

“ Well, sir,” said Hyford, “ how incredible does the hardness of men’s hearts appear ; and yet how much we all resemble this poor miserable man ! ”

“ Very true,” replied Mr. C—— ; “ how many there are who have trembled at the faithful preacher, who have heard him proclaim the terrors of the law, the mercies of the Gospel, the sinfulness of the heart, the necessity of holiness, and felt perfectly convinced that all was true, but the impression was only for the moment : the cares of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, the pleasures of time and sense, choke the seed, and it becomes unfruitful : the effect was transient as the lightning’s flash ; iniquity again gains its ascendancy, the world holds out fresh allurements ; Satan baits his snares with crafty cleverness, and the unhappy victim cries out, “ Go thy way for this time ; when I have a more convenient season, I will call for thee.’ ”

“ And when will that be ? ” interrupted Hyford.

“ Nay,” replied Mr. C——, “ I was going to ask you ; my reply is, Never. Oh ! they know not what they do ; they are not aware that they are thus as completely rejecting Christ as their Saviour as the Jews of old did ;

and because they act thus, they are finally and irrevocably cut off from the benefits the Gospel offers. "To-day," says St. Paul in Heb. iii. 7, quoting from Psalm xcv. 7, 8; 'to-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.' And why? Lest, provoked at their obstinacy, he should 'swear in his wrath, that they shall never enter into his rest.' Many of our Lord's parables proclaim the same fearful truth. 'Those mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither, and slay them before me.' (See Luke xix. 27.) Felix had offers of mercy shown him; he felt the reproaches of the Apostle were deserved, conscience told him all was true; but he turned away from her mild yet faithful voice, he permitted his destroyer to resume his sway, and he dismissed the only real friend he ever had with the promise of seeing him again at a more convenient season."

"And was his wife as hardened as himself, sir?" said Mr. Hill.

"We hear nothing more of her," replied Mr. C——; "but it is generally supposed that, priding herself upon being a daughter of Abraham,—for you remember she is mentioned as a Jewess, (see verse 24,)—she felt certain of escaping, in the great and dreadful day of the Lord, the judgment to come which so alarmed her husband. She called herself a daughter of Abraham, but lacked that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord—she was taken to her great account in a moment, and her unhappy soul realized the terrors of that judgment-seat of which she had heard the Apostle speak, but which then had no effect. I told you that she and her son perished in a fearful eruption of the burning mountain Vesuvius, which continually, more or less, sends forth its awful flames or smoke, and is to this hour a dread reminder of the power and omnipotence of the Lord Jehovah."

"Where was St. Paul to go to?" demanded Hyford.

"Back to prison," replied Mr. C——, "he had no other home then; and there we find he continued for the next two years: for the Holy Spirit reveals the reason why he yet remained a prisoner. Let us turn to the 26th verse, and we shall see. 'He (Felix) hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.' Avarice, or love of money, was one of his ruling passions; he would perform any iniquity in

order to amass wealth. A slave by nature, so he was likewise in his pursuits and passions, and the increase of his treasure was the grand object of his life ; which well-nigh cost him life and liberty, for his extortions at length so provoked the Jews, that they accused him to the Roman Emperor Nero, and he would have suffered severe punishment had it not been for the intercession of his brother Pallas, through whose interest he was at length pardoned. History relates nothing of his subsequent life, and consequently we must conclude our subject rather more abruptly than usual." So saying, the pastor closed his book, and the assembled party, understanding the signal, rose from their seats and departed for their respective homes.

v. 61. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,
AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

Agrippa, the almost Christian.



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THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

"OUR present chapter," remarked Mr. C——, as he slowly opened the pages of his little well-worn Bible, "will present us with a lesson of deep importance,—one upon which it is probable I may say too little, but on which, with all my desire not to be tedious, I am certain I cannot say too much. I allude to king Agrippa, that unhappy prince who was almost persuaded, by the touching eloquence of the Apostle, to cast away his idols and become a Christian, but who, alas! was satisfied with the bare desire, and died, as he had lived, devoid of true religion. But let us turn to the events that followed Paul's being remanded to prison, after he had so nobly and fearlessly preached the truth to Felix and Drusilla, and caused that sinful pair to tremble on their throne. For two years, we are informed by the sacred historian, the apostle continued in confinement. At the end of that time, 'Porcius Festus came into Felix's room,' or became his successor; 'and Felix, wishing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.' With this portion of our history, we last parted; and now I again invite you to observe the noble bearing of the Apostle, and the Christianlike dignity wherewith he meets his rancorous accusers.

"When Festus arrived in the province, he ascended from Cæsarea to Jerusalem. There the high-priest and chief of the Jews were, as usual, ready to overwhelm the governor with accusations of every description against Paul; and they anticipated the pleasure of having him in safe confinement in Jerusalem, from whence they

determined he should not escape with life. How continually have we observed, since we commenced our Bible histories," continued Mr. C——, "the wonderful manner whereby God frustrated the evil designs of man against his own people. 'Whoso,' saith he, 'toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye.' (Zech. ii. 8.) And from this assurance they derive a peace and security that body-guards and legions of honour cannot bestow. It was not the intention of the Divine Providence to permit his servant to be ill-treated by his foes in the capital; the king therefore commanded that he should be detained at Cæsarea, saying 'that he himself would depart shortly thither,' (chap. xxv. 4,) and then gave full permission for all that chose it, to go there and accuse him. Many and grievous were the charges laid by the rulers against the Apostle, even as they did against the Lord Jesus years before, but which they could not prove."

"How true it is," remarked Mr. Lawrence, "that hatred and animosity against real religion is ever the same. The conduct of those bigoted Jews against St. Paul was the same as in the present day, when, in Roman Catholic countries, to be found reading the Bible is a serious crime."

"That was always the case, sir, was it not?" said Mr. Smith.

"Yes," replied Mr. Lawrence; "false religion is always the same. It matters not whether we go back to the distant days of paganism, or the more modern ones of popery, the opposition to true vital godliness is the same. Ignorance is the grand characteristic of paganism, and equally so of popery."

"But surely, Mr. C——," remarked a lady, "all Roman Catholics are not ignorant. I know many who are deeply read, whose knowledge of the works of the ancient fathers is like an unfathomable mine, from whence they are continually producing treasures of learning, and whose arguments can speedily silence those who oppose them."

"I regret to hear it, madam," quietly replied Mr. C——; "for in this case the Lord's people have attempted to do battle without their sword (see Eph. vi. 17), which is a most important part of the accoutrements of a soldier. Believe me, Miss Colman, no Roman Catholic can stand against the pure Word of God. Never mind the fathers; put their treasures of learning into one

scale, and the Bible in the other, and you will soon discover the surest and safest guide."

"But Roman Catholics do not refuse the Bible," returned Miss Colman.

"They do not refuse it, madam," replied Mr. C——; "but they do not maintain its version in its purity: they add unto it, they diminish from it, (see the curse denounced upon those who do so in Rev. xxii. 18, 19,) and they declare it is insufficient of itself; therefore they try to mend it by their own additions of such doctrines as destroy and overturn the mighty truths that God has given to us. The opposing Jews, in our chapter, kept to their traditions, and knew nothing of the holiness required by God's word: hence their determination to destroy the man who would not say to them, 'Peace, peace, when there was no peace.' Festus, the governor, was convinced of Paul's innocence: he saw through the jealousy of his accusers; but, fearful of losing his own situation, he endeavoured to treat them with consideration and respect, and therefore invited them, as we have before seen, to meet him at Cæsarea, and prove their charges. This they could not do; for the Apostle declared boldly that 'neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Cæsar, had he offended anything at all.' Therefore he declared he would appeal for justice to the emperor himself, and would stand at Cæsar's judgment-seat, 'where,' said he, 'I ought to be judged.' In a short time, king Agrippa and his sister Bernice paid their promised visit to Festus. Agrippa was son to the Herod who beheaded James, put Peter into prison, and died in that fearful manner that is recorded in the twelfth chapter of the Acts."

"He was the son of a bad man," observed Hyford.

"Yes," replied Mr. C——, "we have not much good to record of any of the Herodian family. This prince was at Rome when his father died, for the emperor Claudius was very fond of him. Being only seventeen years of age at the time, his dominions were placed under the care of a governor appointed by the court of Rome, until he entered upon the task himself, with the title of king. As it was his interest to be on friendly terms with all the Roman governors, his journey to Cæsarea, upon the present occasion, was to congratulate Festus upon his new appointment; and it is both interesting and curious to read the Scripture history, and

compare it with the accounts written by others. Bernice, I may as well mention," added the pastor, "was sister of Agrippa, and also of Drusilla, the wife of Felix, whom we spoke of last week. She was a woman of bad character, and was celebrated both for her beauty and her wealth. Alas! poor substitutes for that holiness without which no man, or woman either, can see the Lord. We do not like to dwell on these subjects,—they are very sad. The pomp and splendour of courts, the celebrity of beauty or wealth, sink into their real position before the mighty question, 'What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?' (Mark viii. 36, 37.) And yet how this jewel, this inestimable treasure is bartered for the things of time and sense, and men and women live and die like the fool who said, 'Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry;' but who heard the awful words pronounced, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?'"

"Ay," added Hyford, "that was a useful lesson to me, and struck a death-like chill upon my cold worldly heart, particularly when I heard the end of it: 'So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.' Yes, dear sir, that was me, John Hyford: I laid up treasure only for myself. I cared for nought besides; and I might have reaped the fruits of my sin. But no: I was lost, and mercy found me; I was dead, but the voice of the Almighty commanded me to live. I interrupt you, sir," added the old man; "but sometimes my heart is too full, and I must speak."

"You are ever welcome to do so," replied the teacher, with a smile. "I like to hear the observations of any one. Our object is the advancement of God's truth and God's word, and I love to hear one Christian succeed another in his testimony as to its preciousness and value. We will now proceed with our chapter. Festus took an early opportunity, after the arrival of his noble guest, to mention the case of Paul, which greatly perplexed him. He had acted with strict justice with regard to him; for he told the king that Felix had left him in bonds, and that the chief priests and rulers of the Jews had endeavoured to hasten his trial and conviction, but why, he could not tell. It being contrary to the upright dispensation of

justice among the Romans thus hastily to condemn a man to death unheard, Festus added that he commanded both the accusers and the accused to stand before his judgment-seat. There, instead of accusing the prisoner of crimes of various kinds, to the astonishment of the governor, all his offence consisted in denying the continuance of Jesus in the grave. 'They were certain questions of their own superstitions,' said Festus, 'and of one Jesus which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.' (Verse 19.)"

"Superstitions, indeed!" said old Hyford, indignantly; "how little this man, with all his pomp, knew about it."

"Very true," said Mr. C——; "Festus was a heathen. He knew nothing of a Redeemer; the wretched doctrines he had learned had not enlightened his mind, or taught him he was a sinner both by nature and practice. He had never heard of the Messiah, or if he had, imagined him no other than the great men of his own land; and though, perhaps, he might have heard of his crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, yet those were events that had happened thirty years before, and therefore regarded as of little consequence. Alas! it was in ignorance he thought and acted thus: he knew not what he did. And when he treated all the accusations of the Jews as questions relative to their own superstitions, Agrippa, who well knew the reverse, expressed his willingness and readiness to listen to the Apostle's defence."

"Of what religion, then, was Agrippa, sir?" said Mr. Hill.

"He had been instructed in the Jewish faith," replied Mr. C——; "consequently, he well knew the subject of contention, and no doubt was both anxious and willing to hear it discussed. 'On the morrow, therefore, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.' (Verse 23.) The governor introduced him, and then the king said, 'Thou art permitted to speak for thyself.' This was what the apostle wished; and, with his hand stretched out in order to give more effect to his discourse, he replied to all the charges laid against him, in a speech abounding with eloquence and truth. He began with an account of his early years, declaring that, being publicly taught and

educated in the midst of his countrymen, they could all testify that, according to the 'straitest sect of their religion, he lived a Pharisee.'"

"Then he was a bad man, sir, at first," said Hyford.

"Not so fast, my good friend," replied Mr. C——, smiling. "Paul, even before his conversion, was the reverse of a bad man. He was one who acted up to his profession, who endeavoured 'to maintain a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards men;' who had an ardent zeal for the divine glory, and as touching the righteousness which is in the law, he was blameless. He could never be accused of any vile or sinful practices; on the contrary, he was careful to maintain good works, and to live in all 'good conscience before God.' (Acts xxiii. 1.) Such was his early life. You see, my friend, how wrongly you judged him."

"But, sir," said Hyford, "did he not murder Stephen, and persecute God's people?"

"Yes," replied Mr. C——; "but he did it ignorantly in unbelief: his blind mistaken zeal led him to persecute the Church; his religion was confined to outward observances. He was totally ignorant of the spiritual nature of the Divine law, and had no idea that it extended to the government of his inmost thoughts and his secret actions. He murdered Stephen because he preached Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah, and Paul, in common with his countrymen, rejected the idea. He looked upon the crucified Redeemer as a mere imposter, and 'verily thought with himself that he ought to do many things' contrary to what he had inculcated. His people were hateful to him, and he determined upon putting an end to a sect which he ignorantly thought was opposed to Moses. 'He punished them in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, he persecuted them even unto strange cities.' (Acts xxvi. 11.) Such was his account of his conduct as a self-righteous Pharisee; and wherein does he differ from the professor of the present day? My dear people, there may be much zeal for God, and yet little true holiness to guide it. There may be outward excellence, and no inward grace; a name to live, and yet be dead. By immediate revelation from above, this vast difference was to be taught the Pharisaic Saul. We have some time since considered the account of his conversion (see No. 45): he here details particulars of a conversation held with him by his

gracious Master, who thus set him apart for his especial service, declaring that he appeared to him for the purpose of making him 'a minister and a witness both of those things which he had seen, and of those things in the which he would appear unto him,' which was explained in his after experience, when, in his hours of severest trial, he was cheered with the presence of his Lord, who continually gave him the assurance of his grace, and the experience of his love. (See Acts xxvii. 23; Gal. i. 12.) He then proceeds to show Agrippa that his mission was more especially to the Gentiles; those nations who sat in darkness and the shadow of death, and upon whom the light of truth had never shone. The curse of God that fell upon Noah's guilty descendants at Babel produced idolatry and spiritual darkness throughout the world. The nations, scattered over the face of the earth, formed gods after their own imaginations, and in the family of Shem alone the knowledge of Jehovah continued. Hence, when our Lord visited this sinful world, the Jews were the only people who worshipped the Most High, or understood anything of his revealed will. But this state of things was now to cease: the Lord of life had said, 'Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.' (John x. 16.) Blessed be his name, with the calling and separation of St. Paul, this was to be abundantly fulfilled: he was to be especially sent to the Gentiles;—to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God,' that they might 'receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.' (Verse 18.) This was the mission he received from heaven, by the Saviour himself; and well may he hasten to fulfil it, though he did not actually preach to the Gentiles until after the conversion of the centurion Cornelius by Peter, (see Acts x.) as he seemed to wait until the way should be expressly shown him; but he first went to the Jews of Damascus, Jerusalem, and Judea in general, before he visited the Gentiles, exhorting them 'that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.' (Verse 20.) Doctrine such as this the self-righteous descendants of Abraham could not bear; they boasted of their ancient lineage, and talked of Abraham their father; but of his faith, and zeal, and simple piety, they were

totally ignorant, and on all occasions proved themselves most unworthy children, and persecutors of all those who received the meek and lowly Jesus as the Messiah, the promised Saviour.

“Paul taught nothing new : he only proved, from Moses and the prophets, that He who bled on Calvary, and rose again the third day, was indeed the Christ. He explained simply that, in accordance with the Scriptures, he must suffer, he must submit to humiliation, must be despised and rejected of men, and even enter the grave before his wondrous mission could be accomplished ; but that, after he had tasted death, he should again return to life, proving, thereby, that the work of man’s salvation was completed ; and that, by the finished work of the risen Redeemer, he is freely and fully welcome to heaven.

“Astonished at the eloquence and doctrine of the Apostle, his noble auditors had hitherto listened with deep attention ; but the vision of Paul, the revelation from heaven, and the resurrection of Jesus, all appeared so strange, that Festus could no longer restrain himself, but exclaimed in a loud voice, ‘Paul, thou art beside thyself ; much learning doth make thee mad.’ (Verse 24.) Regarding the pagan with compassion and dignity, the Apostle replied, ‘I am not mad, most noble Festus ; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely : for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him ; for this thing was not done in a corner.’ (Verses 25, 26.) The king well knew he spoke the truth, without the least exaggeration. Thousands had seen the Saviour, and attended his public ministry ; and thousands likewise had witnessed the events on Calvary. The news of the resurrection, likewise, was well known ; for it was not the divine intention to maintain secrecy on the matter. All was foretold and fulfilled ; and, though the heathen Roman might be ignorant of what had occurred, the king Agrippa was thoroughly conversant on the subject. When, therefore, the Apostle significantly turned to him, and said, ‘King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets ? I know that thou believest ;’ he immediately replied, ‘Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.’ (Verses 27, 28.) Here, my dear friends,” said Mr. C——, “was the confession of a man whose judgment and understanding were convinced, but whose heart remained unchanged.

The evident truthfulness of the Apostle's discourse, his appeal to the Scriptures, his allusions to the well-known miracles attendant upon the life, sufferings, and resurrection of the Redeemer, and which Agrippa knew were not in the least exaggerated, convinced him that he was no vain enthusiast; and on the impulse of the moment he exclaimed, 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.' Alas! Agrippa does not stand alone in this confession. How many there are who have been carried away, for the moment, by the power of truth, by the eloquence of a book, the earnestness of a preacher, and felt within every variety of contending principle. The judgment and conscience have borne testimony to the word, but there it has ended; the world and its various cares, anxieties, pleasures, and allurements, have crushed the new-sown seed; and, like Agrippa, they have risen up, gone on their way, closed their book, and thought no more about it."

"That is true, too true," said Hyford; "I did it myself a thousand times; and I see it now continually done by others. But the further insight I get into futurity, the more desirous I am to see a smaller number of *almost Christians*. Never relax, dear sir, in delivering your message of warning and invitation. Oh! may you continue for many years faithfully to show the necessity of being in earnest in the affairs of eternity; for I am convinced now there is no middle path in religion. It must be one or the other,—Christian or no Christian; the child of God, or the child of the devil; the heir of heaven, or the heir of hell. I am a plain-spoken old man, ladies," continued the farmer; "but I look round on my fellow-creatures, and see them so anxious, their faces full of care, their hours so occupied, and about what? My own experience enables me to answer, for I was the same once: it is, that they may get on in business; that they may be great, or powerful, or rich; that they may live a merry life, even if it should be a short one; that they may be well to do in the world. But all this while eternity is drawing nearer, and soon they will find they have made a sad mistake."

"You are quite right, Mr. Hyford," resumed Mr. C——, looking upon the fine face of the truly Christian farmer with affectionate pleasure. "You speak the truth: thousands are almost Christians; that is, they are convinced of the truth of the Gospel, of the excellency of the ways of God, of the path they should pursue; but there they

stop. The heart is unregenerate: of the faith that worketh by love, that purifieth the heart, that 'overcometh the world,' they are totally ignorant, and of true vital godliness they know nothing. What is the meaning of the word Christian? A follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. But you will say, How can I imitate him,—Him who was 'holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners?' How can I presume to follow him? My dear friends, 'he has left us an ensample that we should follow his steps;' and with the assistance of his grace we may endeavour to imitate him in his conformity to his heavenly Father's will; in his freedom from that severity of manner which some assume, and which is contrary to the Divine command,—'Be courteous;' in his love, charity, and compassion for all around him; in his respect to the governors and rulers of the land, and in his caution to avoid interfering with the temporal or worldly concerns of any one. 'Man,' said he, to the person who requested him to speak to his brother about the division of some property, 'who made me a judge or a divider over you?' (Luke xii. 14.) No; Jesus came to lead poor sinners to heaven; to teach them to lay up their treasure above; to induce them to forget the things that were behind, and to reach forward to those that were before. (See Phil. iii. 13.) He taught us, by his life and doctrine, what a Christian *ought* to be—what he *must* be, if he would enter into life, if he would attain eternal happiness. Oh! that you may lay this to heart, and 'examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith.' Be not almost, but altogether Christians. Live, act, speak as Christians. 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you *richly*,' that you may be as lights shining in the world, and 'adorning the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things.' Never fear the reproach, the scoffs, the taunts of the ungodly: they will fall harmless; they cannot hurt you. Every arrow aimed at the Christian is blunted by a sense of Divine love, which causes him to rejoice if he is counted worthy to suffer for his sake. Such were the feelings of Paul: he gloried in the Cross; but, above all, in his high and holy calling. 'I would to God,' replied he to the king, 'that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.' How comprehensive was this! He felt the Gospel to be true; he experienced a joy and peace in believ-

ing ; he looked entirely to Jesus Christ for salvation ; and he knew that there was a crown of glory laid up for him, which, ere long, would more than compensate him for all his sorrows and afflictions here. Oh ! may you be Christians in reality, and not merely in profession, and finally be partakers of that everlasting inheritance which the love of a Saviour has freely bestowed."

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BY MRS. BEST,

AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

St. Paul's Voyage to Rome.



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THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

“ You recollect the subject of our last chapter,” observed Mr. C——; “ the Lord Jesus had declared that Paul should stand before rulers and kings and the great people of the earth as his witness of the truth, and that as he had testified of him in Jerusalem, so he purposed for him to do the same at Rome. All must be fulfilled, and the ministry appointed him must be accomplished. Agrippa at once pronounced him innocent, his own convictions pleaded in his favour, and Paul departed from his presence admired and acquitted.”

“ Do we hear anything more of this king, sir ?” said Hyford; “ did he become a Christian ?”

“ No,” replied Mr. C——, “ his goodness was as the ‘ morning cloud,’ and his convictions passed away as the ‘ early dew;’ we never hear of him making further inquiries into the faith and practice of the Christians, but from history we learn that when he saw the storm gathering, which finally destroyed the Jewish nation, he exerted himself to the utmost to prevent it, and endeavoured to induce the people to submit to Rome. But all his entreaties were of no avail; madly enticed onwards to their complete destruction, the Jews would hear of no compromise, and at length when the war had actually begun, Agrippa was obliged to join the Roman soldiers, and assist in taking Jerusalem. After that event, he retired to Rome with his sister Bernice, and is said to have died there at the age of seventy. Such is the account gleaned from history of the subsequent life of this last descendant of the Herodian family. We now return to St. Paul, whose earthly labours were drawing to a close. He had

appealed for justice to Cæsar, and Festus was bound to send him : his great Master had work for him to do in Rome, and much people had already received the Gospel before his arrival, so that his visit, under any circumstances, was anticipated by the believers with delight, and his imprisonment was overruled by God, for the furtherance of his truth. But we must not anticipate, but follow the Apostle through his long and perilous voyage, regarded as a prisoner, yet watched over, protected, and led by the hand of Jehovah, who shielded and preserved him from harm. When he quitted the presence of the king and Festus, preparations were immediately made for his going into Italy; and, accordingly, Paul, with other prisoners, were delivered 'unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus's band.' It has been supposed from the name, that this Julius was a freedman belonging to the Julian family, and that he was an officer in the emperor's own legion or regiment; the consideration with which Paul was treated before his judges appears to have made a favourable impression upon him, for he 'courteously entreated' him, 'and gave him liberty to go to his friends to refresh himself.' The whole of this voyage is recorded with the utmost minuteness by St. Luke, the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, and Paul's constant companion for some time in his travels; we know from experience the pleasure we derive from dwelling upon the words and actions of those saints, who are honoured above others by their Lord; in the Scriptures their lives are recorded for our imitation and example, while their failings are mentioned for our warning, and to teach us that *in* and *of* ourselves we are unable to stand. It appears that the sailors made but slow progress; the winds were contrary, and much time was lost, while the mariners, who imperfectly understood their business, were fearful of losing sight of land."

"There is one expression in the account of this voyage that has often puzzled me," said Mr. Martin. "What is meant by the 'sailing being dangerous, because the fast was now already past?' What fast? and what had that to do with it?"

"The fast," replied Mr. C——, "here spoken of, was the great day of atonement, which was appointed by the Levitical law to be kept on the tenth of the month Tisri, or about the 25th of September, which, you are aware, is about the time of the autumnal equinox, when storms

prevail in those seas, and the timid mariners of those days were unable to counteract the difficulties and dangers that beset them. But it appears they were even much later in the year than this, and consequently their peril increased."

"Yes," remarked Mr. Lawrence, "even in these days of improved navigation, the 'Michaelmas flows,' as they are called, are regarded with some degree of apprehension, and the violent and sudden storms to which the Mediterranean is subject are well known to all who traverse it."

"In the spirit of prophecy," resumed Mr. C——, "the Apostle forewarned the people who sailed with him, telling them, that it would prove a voyage of much hurt and damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of their lives. (See chap. xxvii. verse 10.) 'Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter.' (Verses 11, 12.) How often does human prudence fail us! Had the captain of the vessel and centurion taken heed to Paul, loss and danger would have been prevented; but thus it is, in spiritual as well as natural things. The servants of God behold him in his threatened judgments, they see him in the conflict of nations, in the muttering of the distant battle-field, they accept the warning for themselves, and endeavour to make others heed it also. But how seldom are they regarded! They are looked upon as alarmists, as poor visionaries, and their words are given to the winds. I may, perhaps," continued Mr. C——, "be thus looked upon by some whom I now address, but be it so, I shall feel that I have fulfilled my mission, which says, 'Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.' (Ezek. iii. 17.) To you, therefore, my hearers, as the spiritual Israel, the people of the Lord, I would say, 'Behold the day of the Lord is at hand, when he has "a controversy with the nations."' This is neither the time nor place to talk to you of politics, but the hand of God is so manifestly exhibited in the present eventful times, that it is the part of the Christian teacher and minister to point it out to his people, and to prove to them 'that the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand.' (Joel ii. 1.) The judgments of God are to be seen on every side, and

like the billows of the troubled ocean will engulf all who attempt, in their own unassisted strength, to rush through the coming storm."

"Please to add a little more upon this all-important subject, Mr. C——," said Mr. Basil; "forewarned, you know, is forearmed. I agree with you that the time is come for Christian teachers to speak out, to warn, to rebuke, and exhort; to lay before their people the events that are occurring far and near, and to blow the alarm trumpet with untiring zeal."

"In compliance with Mr. Basil's wishes," resumed Mr. C——, "I will take a hasty glance at a few of the strange events that every day produces, and which I am convinced are signs of the nearness of the advent of the Great Messiah. Let us turn to the Bible, our sure and unerring guide, and see what proof it gives us, whereby we may know that the end is near, even at the doors. Listen to what Paul says to his beloved Timothy—'This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.' (2 Tim. iii. 1—5.) Here, my dear friends, is a picture drawn by the Holy Spirit of mankind, and I ask you, is it not a sad likeness to the human family of the present day?"

"Was it ever otherwise, sir?" said Mr. Wakefield.

"More or less," replied Mr. C——, "these hateful dispositions have ever prevailed; they are the natural produce of the unregenerate heart, but I believe, take them as a whole, they never were to a greater extent than now. The selfishness of this age is proverbial; self is the idol, the grand mover of plans and schemes and actions, while *Infidelity*, *Popery*, and *Priestcraft* have issued from the depths of hell, and seem to be let loose upon the earth. Under these three hateful leaders I would range the list of vices I have quoted, and I would implore you to consider, as you are immortal beings, the necessity for your coming out, and being separate, and not so much as touching the unclean thing. The effects of infidel principles are daily manifest, for though ours is the most religious country in the world,

alas ! it is too manifest that a very large proportion of the people are destitute of religion, and it has been lamentably the fashion to imitate the evil imported from abroad ; but now, it may be, the horrors that have occurred in France may open the eyes of our countrymen, and cause them to tremble lest in like manner they should be left to themselves, and reap the fruit of their own iniquity. Woe to that individual or nation that is led captive by the devil at his will ! What a pitiful, wretched contrast does he present to him who has entered the service of the living God. Truly, religion's 'ways are pleasantness,' and her paths are those of peace, while 'the wicked flee when no man pursueth,' and with unfeigned horror anticipate the arrival of that day 'when the Lord Jesus shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.' (2 Thess. i. 10.)

"Ah, sir," said Hyford, "I often think of that day, and of its joys and sorrows. May we all find mercy then !"

"Amen," solemnly replied Mr. C——, "and to this end may we so act as that it shall not come upon us unawares, but may we 'give all diligence to make our calling and election sure.' One thing is certain ; there is 'no peace to the wicked,' for they are 'like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.' (Isa. lvii. 20.)"

"This is daily exemplified," remarked Mr. Lawrence. "We see it proved on every side ; in the dwelling of the noble and the cottage of the labourer, it is easy to discover whether or not the Bible and its contents are prized, and to what extent. Pain, sorrow, trials innumerable may be sent, but that precious book enables the believer to rejoice, even in tribulations, and glory in the Cross. But reverse the picture, and behold the infidel, the man who believes not in God, who is without hope, without an interest in Jesus ; behold him similarly tried, and what is the result ? Wretchedness beyond description, and misery already begun. Behold the unhappy papist ; where is his hope ? Alas ! he clings to his priest, his penances, his alms, but they serve him not in the day of calamity, and thousands yearly become the victims of this soul-destroying faith. You mentioned France, Mr. C—— ; truly that land of irreligion is a beacon to the people of the earth ; it might be one of the first among the nations, but its inhabitants care not for God ; his day is profaned, his book is disregarded, his worship is turned into blasphemy,

and does he not say, 'Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?' (Jer. v. 9.) Yes, truly, and we have seen that 'their abominations were according as they loved,' (Hosea ix. 10,) and that as 'he delighted not in blessing, so it shall be far from him.' May England take warning and prize her privileges; may she clasp her Bible to her heart, and have its precepts engraven on her soul; this is what will exalt and ensure her prosperity, and cause her to be known throughout the world, as the land in which the Lord delighteth, and wherein he hath condescended to put his name. But I detain you, Mr. C——."

"Many thanks for your remarks, sir," replied the pastor; "like Paul and his friends, we would assist each other in raising the voice of warning, and which I trust will be heeded, instead of turning a deaf ear to our entreaties, as the captain of the vessel did, and produced danger to his passengers and loss to himself. And now let us return to our chapter and see how the voyagers are faring. We left them ploughing the waves and endeavouring to reach Phenice, 'an haven of Crete;' but it was the Divine pleasure to frustrate all their plans. He determined to show these poor heathens that 'he was God, and none else;' his honour and power were to be magnified, and the conduct of Paul and his companions presented so beautiful a contrast to the terrified multitude that they must have felt the difference. Yes, in that little vessel, tossed to and fro upon the mighty deep, were some of the Lord's redeemed ones; it was as much the object of his protecting care, as the ark that contained the rescued Noah and his family; its freight was very precious, and his word had gone forth, that none should perish. What a beautiful history this is, from first to last, of the watchfulness and superintendence of our God. 'He never slumbers or sleeps; he is about our bed and about our path,' and whether we travel by land or water we are equally safe and secure. As long as he has any employment for his people, they are immortal—nothing can harm them. 'Fear not,' he says to them; 'when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.' (Isa. xliii. 2.) God had declared to Paul he must 'bear witness of him in Rome;'

and consequently thither he must go. Euroclydon, the tempestuous wind, may blow with all its might, and the most fearful blast may arise, but no matter, Paul must visit Rome. He who causeth his winds to blow, and who 'has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,' (Isa. xl. 12,) was watching over him; not a hair of the heads of any in that frail bark was to perish, for God had given them all to Paul, who again was told that he must be brought before Cæsar; but in order to prove to the people that their deliverance should come from the Lord Jehovah alone, we find that in despair they first threw out all the lumber, and then the tackling of the ship, which had been taken for her navigation and future use, but which they now parted with in the hope of keeping her from sinking. But human means were to be vain, no sun or stars for three long days were visible, whereby they might guide their course; clouds and gloom beset them, and at last the horror of death fell upon them. In that fearful hour, behold the conduct of the servant of God; the distress they were in prevented them from desiring food, 'But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.' (Verses 21—26.) Observe, my dear friends, the expression used by the Apostle in reference to God; 'Whose I am, and whom I serve.' By nature, in common with all the children of Adam, he was a child of wrath, a servant of sin; by grace he became one of the great family of God, who are redeemed by the blood of Jesus, separated to his service, and bound to devote themselves to his honour and glory. This was the end and aim of his existence; all the powers of mind and body were given to him in whom his soul delighted; no difficulties could intimidate him, no dangers alarm him, no labours fatigue him; he was scourged five times by the Jews, three times he was beaten with rods, once he was

stoned, three times endured the horrors of shipwreck, being for a night and a day in the sea, besides other trials and hardships; yet none of these things moved him, neither did he count his life dear unto himself so that he might 'finish his course with joy.' (See Acts xx. 24.) He tried to prove himself a faithful servant, and while divine grace upheld, and enabled him to continue steadfast unto the end, the same love whispered to him in the hour of trial and danger, 'Fear not.' Thrice happy they who are the servants of the living God! All things are sure to come right with them; they are his 'by a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten,' (Jer. l. 5,) and they feel that their 'names are written in the Lamb's book of life.' Well may they labour in his cause, 'not counting their lives dear unto themselves;' they serve a noble Master, and whether the path through which he leads them be rough or smooth, they care not, if they can but enjoy the light of his countenance and hear him say, 'Fear not, for I am with thee.' How often have these sweet words encouraged the fainting soul of the tempted and tried believer; he has been like a soldier knocked down for a moment, but the precious assurance that his captain is near, induces him to rally, crying, 'Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me.' (Micah. vii. 8.) One word more upon this part of our chapter before we leave it. Observe the time chosen by God for strengthening and comforting his servant—it was when they were 'exceedingly tossed with a tempest,' when they were deprived of the cheering sight of either sun or stars, black gloomy clouds obscuring both, and when all hope of saving themselves by their own exertions vanished, then the 'Angel of God stood by him, and said, Fear not.' Here then is a word for all his people during their earthly pilgrimage: they may be tossed upon the waves of trial and affliction,—yes, 'exceedingly tossed;' deep, heavy sorrows may press upon them, and that light, that cheering ray of the divine countenance may be withheld; they may go on their way mourning, and saying, 'The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me,' (Isa. xlix. 14,) and 'by night on their bed they sought him whom their soul loveth: they sought him, but they found him not,' (Cant. iii. 1;) hope seemed well nigh extinguished, and with the despairing Hezekiah, king of

Judah, they exclaim, 'I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living,' (Isa. xxxviii. 11;) but is it so? 'Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more?' (Psa. lxxvii. 9. 7.) No, my friends, in that dark and dreary hour, he says, 'O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires,' (Isa. liv. 11,) the emblem of love. Yes, 'He has loved' his people 'with an everlasting love,' (Jer. xxxi. 3,) and nothing can separate them from it. (See Rom. viii. 38.) With wings of love he hastened down on earth to repair the devastation made by sin. Love arrests the sinner while following the bent of his corruptions, and says unto him, Live. And we have just seen that by the mouth of his servant Isaiah he comforts the afflicted and distressed, by declaring he will fix them on a foundation of love. Again, he sometimes hides his face, and the cheering light of his countenance disappears; but whither will the redeemed soul go? can he derive from man, or the world, or any earthly thing consolation or peace? No; truly he says of such, 'Miserable comforters are ye all;' (Job xvi. 2.) How then does he act? He says to himself, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him,' (Job xiii. 15;) and in the words of Peter he exclaims, 'Lord, to whom shall I go? thou hast the words of eternal life.' (John vi. 68.) This is enough, the hour of trial is past, the Lord is magnified by the faith of his servant. Satan, the 'accuser,' is again defeated and put to shame, and the precious words, 'Fear not,' again restore the soul to joy and peace in believing.

"I am as perfectly satisfied," added Mr. C——, "of the safety of God's people, as I am of my own existence; 'they shall *never* perish,' says their Redeemer, 'neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.' (John x. 28.) It could not be; bought by the blood of Christ, they are his; he sets his mark upon them, by giving them his Spirit, whereby they are enabled to live and act according to his mind and will; he sends them forth to labour for him, he gives them daily supplies of grace out of his own fulness, he makes them shine as lights in the world. Happy, thrice happy they who belong to his company. May all who now hear me be of the enviable number! Of his service and his wages I cannot say too much, for the

former is 'perfect freedom,' and the latter, 'a crown of glory that fadeth not away.' For fourteen days and nights was the little vessel driven up and down, unable to make land; the extreme ignorance of the nations, at that time, of nautical affairs, increased the danger, and the ship having become quite unmanageable, the sailors felt that as they got into shallow water, all they could do was to throw 'four anchors out of the stern and wish for the day.' (Verse 29.) At last it dawned, the long wished-for land was near, but what it was they knew not,—neither could they depend upon meeting with friends in the inhabitants. The sailors, caring only for themselves, determined to leave the vessel and seek their own safety; but no, they were yet to use the means, the salvation of the passengers was to be of God, but the ship was not to be forsaken until he permitted it. To prevent, therefore, the men quitting it, 'the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, into which they were going, and let her fall off,' (Verse 32.) 'And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take some meat . . . and he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all : . . . and when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast the wheat into the sea.' (Verses 33—38.) By this time, the day fully dawned, and they were able to see their way; but no sooner had they made towards shore, than they grounded in a place where there were opposite currents; consequently the vessel, unable to bear the continual dashing of the sea over her, gave way and divided. Now the hour for quitting her was come, 276 souls must commit themselves to the deep. The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners, lest any might escape, but Julius, for Paul's sake, prevented this; he could not act with such cruelty before one who had spoken and acted as the Apostle; and therefore he determined to run the risk of losing his prisoners, rather than have a man he so justly admired sustain the slightest injury. Thus, as God saved all in the ship for Paul's sake, so does the centurion act likewise. And is no lesson to be learnt from this? was this fact recorded merely for the sake of its historical interest? Oh, no! it speaks to you, my hearers, and to all, for it is mentioned for our encouragement, that as we are told that 'one *sinner* destroyeth much good,' (Eccles. ix. 18,) so here we are enabled to see what a blessing the true servant of God is, wherever he may go, and with

whomsoever he may associate ; his words, his actions, his conscientious discharge of relative duties, his uprightness in worldly transactions, his faith, his unselfish conduct, render him an example to others; and it has not unseldom happened that a holy consistency has been the means employed by God for persons, hitherto careless, being led to consider their own ways, see their deficiency, and ask for grace to enable them to do better for the time to come. May it be thus with you, that in all things you may be Christians, not in name only, but in spirit and in truth.

No. 63. N. T.]

TRACTS
ON THE
NEW TESTAMENT HISTORIES.

BY MRS. BEST,
AUTHOR OF TRACTS ON THE PARABLES, &c. &c.

Melita.—Conclusion.



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AMONGST the numerous persons assembled and assembling at the Court, our friend Hyford, on the present occasion, was one of the first. His brow was ruffled, and it was easy to see he was not well pleased : he occupied his usual place, his hat on the floor at his feet, and his head resting on his hands, which were supported by a well polished stout oak stick, rather of club dimensions, and which had upheld the steps of the sturdy yeoman for the last few years. He appeared deep in thought, and it was not until his favourite, Mr. Lawrence, arrived, that he seemed to care to look about him. That gentleman always sat close to him, and thoroughly enjoyed his original remarks, united with sound piety and practical experience. He soon perceived that all was not right, but he waited until the old man would choose to give utterance to his feelings. At last, rather to his astonishment, he abruptly said, " Mr. Lawrence, I don't like this day."

" Why not?" replied Mr. Lawrence; " it is very fine, the air is delightful, all nature looks cheerful, and why should you quarrel with it, my good friend ? "

" Oh!" returned Hyford, " the day itself is well enough; I do not speak of that; but is not this our last day here? have we not come to the end of our chapters? I told Mr. C—— long ago he was bundling them up too fast, and that they would be finished too soon, and I was right; I looked into the book before I started from home, and I saw that the Acts of the Apostles contain only twenty-eight chapters, and so we have come to the end, and I am sorry, very sorry. It has been very pleasant to

me, Mr. Lawrence, to hear Mr. C—— treat so fully on the life and actions of Jesus ; to listen to his entreaties that we should be his disciples, and follow him even as the apostles did ; and now it is all at an end, and our pleasant meetings will cease," added the old man with a sorrowful voice, which proved the sincerity of his regrets.

"I hope not," replied Mr. Lawrence, "it may be Mr. C—— will take another subject ; the Bible, you know, is an inexhaustible mine. Besides, you hear him constantly on the Old Testament Histories, so I think you may be satisfied, for after all we must not exact too much of him. But here he comes to answer for himself."

The worthy pastor entered the room, and went to his table ; he looked round with an affectionate smile upon his friends, saying, "The goodness of God has spared us to see on this day the completion of our New Testament Histories ; if any good has been done, or any knowledge in divine things increased, to Him alone be the praise who has sent me to labour amongst you, and put his words into my mouth, enabling me to speak a word in season on his behalf."

"But are our pleasant meetings to be at an end, Mr. C——?" said Mrs. Basil.

"That shall be as you please," replied Mr. C—— ; "I am ever ready to act as you wish me, and in such a way as may promote the Divine glory and your advantage. I am not my own, but your servant, for Jesus' sake ; and if you wish me to continue our meetings, you must yourselves furnish me with a subject. You are aware I have carefully gone through the Gospels, first noticing the parables, next the events of the Saviour's life, and lastly, the Acts of the Apostles, as written by St. Luke, so as to give us the first part of the history of the Church of Christ, after the ascension of her Lord and Master into heaven. With our chapter of to-day we conclude the account handed down to us in the pages of inspiration : from that period we must seek into volumes still extant, wherein the narrative is continued, and whereby we may carry it on even to the present time. But with that we have nothing to do here, though the many accounts written by various excellent and learned men are deeply interesting and instructive.* On the Old Testament Histories I cannot enter ; with that I am engaged with a

* For instance, Milner's Church History, Mosheim's Eccles. History, &c.

large number of my poorer flock, who look forward to our day and hour of meeting with a delightful eagerness, and who will, I trust, continue to derive deep practical knowledge of the word and will of God by this close examination. Placed by his providence amongst you, it has been to me a source of unfeigned gratitude that he has assisted me in my task; that he has enabled me to lay before you, I trust with humility and earnestness, the truth as it is in Jesus; that he has put his words into my mouth, and not permitted them to return unto him void, but has led me to hope, that through his condescending grace, they 'may be as bread cast upon the waters, which may be found after many days.'

"But we must no longer talk of ourselves, but turn our attention to the shipwrecked Apostle and his numerous companions. Our last chapter closed with the fulfilment of the promise, that not one should be lost out of that large number. God never wants for means for bringing his word to pass. He had said that not a hair of their heads should perish, and he causes the broken pieces of the vessel to aid the helpless and support the sinking. May we profit by the lesson set before us! Think you the Divine Spirit merely recorded this deliverance to complete the narrative? Oh no, a deep and precious truth is concealed beneath it, and many a believer reads in these verses an accomplishment of his own earnest desires. He sees his vessel tossed to and fro amidst the most fearful trials, but though the outward man decays, the inward soul is daily renewed more and more, and the last great act that snaps asunder the fragile bark, beholds the freed soul rushing from the wreck, and landing safely upon that peaceful shore, where 'the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.'"

"Ah, sir," said Hyford, "a peep into the future like this repays us for much sorrow; and if the anticipation be so cheering, what must the reality be?"

"And how and where is it we have become acquainted with such precious truths, Mr. Hyford?" demanded Mr. C——.

"How! Where! Why, out of the Bible, to be sure," replied the old man with quickness; "where else could we have learnt it. Not out of our naturally vile, contemptible, corrupt hearts, that's certain. No, they were always saying to us, 'Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die.' (1 Cor. xv. 32.) But the Bible—thank God for giving us his Bible. Yes, His Bible,

HIS WORD, which shall stand for ever and ever. I am old and grey-headed, but the Bible is such a treasure that it puts new life into me, and when I read or hear it, my heart warms to it, and I verily believe I would knock the man down who would dare to rob me of it."

"May this same feeling become more universal," said Mr. C——; "though I do not wish to hear of your coming to blows with any man, still I do earnestly implore you, as you value your immortal souls, to prize God's word, and protect it with a holy fervent care. We live in times when a fierce contest is going on between the Lord's people and the devil's agents. It was foretold by Jesus, the great Head of the Church, in Rev. xvii. 14, 'These shall make war with the Lamb;' but woe unto them! 'the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is King of kings and Lord of lords;' and yet the miserable 'potsherds of the earth,' (Isa. xlv. 9,) blinded by their lying master, the devil, are urged on to their own confusion, and to their complete destruction; while, on the contrary, the believers in Jesus, who 'are called, and chosen, and faithful,' shall maintain a glorious battle, shall be upheld and daily strengthened from above, and shall before long hear their adorable Captain say to them, 'Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord.' The fury of Papal Rome is now nearly at its height. 'Down with the Bible!' is her cry, for she well knows that therein her character and picture are drawn to the life. 'Down with the Bible!' she says, 'or we shall soon become a proverb and a by-word among those nations who have hitherto knelt at our feet, and supported us in pomp and luxury.' The Bible and Popery cannot stand together, and therefore we find the poor miserable monks and priests committing it to the flames, in the fond hope that by so doing they should quench the light of truth. Miserable, misguided men! they might as well expect that a bucket of water poured into the crater or mouth of Vesuvius, the burning mountain, would extinguish its terrific fires, as to think that because they commit a few Bibles to the flames, they can prevent God's word having free course and being glorified. It is sad to see man, destined for honour, and glory, and immortality, thus led captive by the devil at his will, and filling up the measure of his iniquities, bringing upon himself swift destruction. Were the feelings of those persons who, a few Sundays back, burnt the Bible in Ireland very enviable? Alas! they knew not what they did; the Rev. Mr.

Townsend of Ballyover, in the county Mayo, relates, that a priest gave orders to the school-children to go into a field, collect some Bibles and destroy them ; and he adds, that he saw them take these books, God's holy word, throw them on the ground, kick them about, beat them with sticks, and then burn them to ashes, which afterwards they buried: nor was this all ; a monk, on another Sunday, was seen talking to a crowd who had been to mass, on the vile nature of the book he had in his hand, which, my dear friends, was a BIBLE ; and after going on like a madman for a considerable time, ended his discourse by burning it, kicking it about, and the people acting the part of so many fiends, until the police were obliged to disperse the mob. And this, O ye Christian people of England, the land of Bibles, which is the bulwark of her prosperity and peace, happened a few Sundays since, viz. in December 1851, to the eternal disgrace of the Popish religion."

"And more shame for it," remarked Hyford ; "but does the Pope allow such doings, sir, or can he know of them ?"

"He not only knows, but encourages them," replied Mr. C—— ; "he hates the Bible, and the Bible Society, and everything belonging to the Bible."

"Miserable old man !" said Hyford ; "he is indeed to be pitied ; far more an object of envy is John Hyford, of the Hoping Farm, tenant of Mr. Basil, and eating his bread by the sweat of his brow, than the Pope of Rome, with his three crowns, and his pomp and glory and dominion over the nations ; for old John is, through wondrous mercy to the chief of sinners, an heir, he hopes, of heaven ; while it is certain sure, the Pope is the enemy of God, and therefore the heir of hell. Ah, ladies ! which is most to be envied, think you ? and in the great day of judgment which will stand the firmest ? the sinner saved by grace and marked with the token of the Lord's freedmen, or the sinner standing in his own vain glory, and fully expecting heaven as his reward ? O Lord !" fervently added the old man, "deliver me and all I love from the soul-destroying doctrines of Popery."

"I rejoice you so truly see them in this light," said Mr. C——, "and I trust each and all of my people will do the same ; but we must not forget our chapter, for many parts are highly interesting, and when I tell you that the very island whereon the apostle and his com-

panions were shipwrecked now belongs to the British Crown, your interest in the place will be increased. 'And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita,' or Malta as it is now called. But here I must refer you to Mr. Lawrence, who has visited it, which, I regret to say, I have not."

"Well, sir," said Hyford, "it's a fine thing to have been in foreign parts, and I like to hear all about them, but I do not think travelling would suit English John; he loves his own free land too well, to live peaceably with those folks that are of a different religion, and take strange views of things, and talk uncommon languages.—But please to tell us, sir."

"I visited Malta twice," said Mr. Lawrence, "both when I went abroad and on my return after I quitted Greece, for you remember I told you I was at Athens, and described to you Mars' Hill."

"I recollect," muttered Hyford.

"Well," continued Mr. Lawrence, "the first time I landed there in the noble harbour of Valetta, it was winter, and the climate was delightful; we had rain occasionally, and sometimes the air was cold, but there frost and snow are unknown; but I also was there about August, when the heat was so oppressive that the night was as intolerable as the day, and the parched earth was never refreshed by a single shower, though the dews that fell almost every night preserved the health of the crops. They have no meadow land, neither are oats grown upon the island."

"Then what do they do for fodder for the horses?" demanded the farmer with evident interest.

"They grow large quantities of barley, which they cut and give them in a green state, and the straw is instead of hay. But they have a plant called 'Sulla,' the same as the French honeysuckle, which grows about four or five feet high, and bears a beautiful crimson blossom, which is much esteemed as being both substantial and nourishing food. The quantity of corn grown is only enough for the supply of the inhabitants for about four months in the year, for the principal crop of the country is cotton. It was on the north-westward of the island that St. Paul was shipwrecked; I visited the bay which is marked by bearing his name. At the time mentioned in the Acts, (chap. xxviii.) it belonged to the Romans, and was peopled by the descendants of its former masters.

The French possessed themselves of it under Buonaparte; but in 1814 it was given up to the English, whose protection the people prefer to that of any other nation."

"And what is their religion?" inquired Mr. Hill.

"The Roman Catholic," replied Mr. Lawrence; "but as there are about a thousand Protestants also there, it is observable that by degrees the popish observances are less strict than formerly, and we may trust that a blessing will rest upon the efforts that are made for the increase of the truth. The late excellent Queen Dowager, Adelaide, visited Malta in 1839, and seeing the deficiency of church accommodation for the Protestants, determined upon erecting a suitable place of worship at her sole expense, in Valetta, the capital city."

"Were the people in a complete state of barbarism when St. Paul visited them?" inquired Mrs. Basil.

"I should say not in the sense that we apply the term," replied Mr. C——, "but we must recollect that in those days all who were ignorant of the languages of Greece and Rome were looked down upon, and certainly their superstition with regard to the Apostle proved them both simple and ignorant. We read, that having received the poor shipwrecked strangers with the greatest kindness, they proceeded to kindle a fire to warm and dry them. 'And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.' (Verse 3.)"

"It is very remarkable," observed Mr. Lawrence, "that now no venomous reptiles are known; I took some trouble to ascertain this fact, on account of the history given by St. Luke."

"Both circumstances are undoubtedly correct," remarked Mr. C——; "though the race may be extinct now, there were evidently poisonous snakes in St. Paul's time, and the people were accustomed to look upon them with dread on account of their dangerous effects. The viper fastening upon the Apostle without injuring him, spoke loudly to the senses of the poor ignorant idolaters; they thought any man thus invulnerable could not be less than a god: we, who have our precious Bible, know that it was the fulfilment of the Redeemer's promise to his disciples, (see Mark xvi. 18,) and that in this instance he used it as a sign to exalt his servant in the eyes of the people, and induce them to lend a willing ear to his message of mercy and redeeming love. Nor was this all, the father of Publius,

the Roman governor of the island, was dangerously ill, 'to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him and healed him,' in return for the kindness and hospitality his son had shown; and no sooner was the miracle generally known, than all who had diseases came and were healed, and truly had cause to rejoice in the event that had brought such a visitor amongst them. For three months they sojourned there, and at length set sail once again for Rome in a ship belonging to the City of Alexandria." When Mr. C—— arrived at this part of his chapter, Hyford, who had been studiously following him with his eyes fixed on his Bible, began to frown, and look puzzled. His peculiar expression of countenance amused all who noticed it. At last he said—

"Here is something very unaccountable and strange. The ship's sign was 'Castor and Pollux,' what can this possibly mean? If ever we wanted an interpreter to outlandish words, it is now, sir, though, no doubt, you will make it plain."

"I am not surprised that you should be puzzled, my worthy friend," replied Mr. C——, "and you have reason to bless your heavenly Father that you live in a country, and at a time, when you have to ask the meaning of such senseless vanities. It is customary to place at the head of vessels some figure or device,—a man's head, a woman, an animal, carved by way of ornament, and once I saw an open book, which filled me with curiosity to see what was written on its pages, and to my delight I found it was a considerable portion of the 107th Psalm, and as I read the words, which I distinctly did, 'They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep,' I felt as if that vessel was dedicated to the Lord Jehovah, and was the object of his especial care. But far different were the figures on the ship of Alexandria: their sign was Castor and Pollux, two fabulous gods, supposed to be twin sons of Jupiter, the chief god of the heathen, and worshipped by sailors, as they considered them their protecting deities."

"Away with such folly," exclaimed Hyford with vehemence; "it is a reflection upon common sense that men can be such fools."

"These poor people were to be pitied," replied Mr. C——; "they knew no better; from their infancy they had been taught to worship idols of wood and stone, and

as yet the glad tidings of a new and better faith had not reached them: it is not difficult for us to suppose that during his voyage the holy Paul would endeavour to teach them differently, and exhort them to 'turn from their dumb idols to serve the living God.' At last his perils by sea were over, and the Apostle arrived safely at Puteoli, a sea-port town within the Bay of Naples; it was noted for its hot springs, which were useful in curing various diseases. 'Appii Forum' and 'The Three Taverns' were both resting-places on the high road to Rome, the former being fifty-one miles, and the latter thirty-three from that mighty city. 'The Three Taverns' are mentioned in history as 'The three victualling houses,' where the Emperor Severus was strangled by the treason of two of his subjects, Maximianus Herculus, and his son Maxentius. To these places many disciples hastened to greet the Apostle and welcome his arrival amongst them, which so comforted him after all his trials, that his spirit was indeed refreshed, and with joy he bent his steps towards Rome. There he appears to have enjoyed comparative liberty, for he 'was suffered to dwell by himself' with a soldier who kept him, and to whom it is supposed he was chained."

"Why is it thought so, Mr. C——?" asked Mr. Martin.

"Because in the 20th verse he refers to it," replied Mr. C——; "he there says, 'that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain;' observe, the 'hope of Israel,' that is, Jesus Christ, the object of Israel's hope, the desire of all nations, the Messiah, the Prince of Peace; because he had declared Jesus to be indeed the promised Saviour, and his resurrection from the dead the fundamental doctrine of man's justification, inasmuch as thereby he proved the great work of atonement was fully accomplished, and the kingdom of heaven open to all believers without distinction. It was for preaching these great truths, he told the Roman Jews, his nation had quarrelled with him, and that to declare his innocence of the charges brought against him, he had determined to appeal to Cæsar. This seemed to them reasonable, and they were so struck with the calmness of his manner, and the truths he uttered, that they expressed a desire to hear more concerning the Christians, against whom they were prejudiced, imagining that Jesus came to destroy the law and the prophets. But no, he came to fulfil, to obey the law for man, and to complete all that was 'written in the law of Moses, and in the Pro-

phets, and in the Psalms concerning himself.' It was from these portions the Apostle argued; from morning till night he laboured to convince them, and, as is ever the case, 'some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.' (Verse 24.) The consequence of this destructive apathy among the Jews was, that God would for a time permit them to be blinded, would withhold from them those convictions produced by the Spirit, which causes sinners first to see their lost state by nature, and their need of a Saviour, that so his grace might be manifested to the Gentile world, who would gladly hail the offered salvation. Hence, my dear friends, the blessed privileges we enjoy: 'we are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;' to us 'the word of reconciliation has been sent,' and our gracious heavenly Father has inclined our naturally hard hearts to feel and appreciate the preciousness of a Saviour. Oh! endeavour to love him more and serve him better; he is ready and willing now to receive all without exception who come to him: all the 'fitness he requires of you is to feel your need of him;' to see yourselves as you really are, to be viewed in the glass of God's word; sinners, unable even so much as to think a holy thought, or perform a single action acceptable in itself before God. I know this to be unwelcome truth to some, but, dear friends, 'judge yourselves, that ye be not judged of the Lord,' who 'came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' Methinks you, like the Jews of old, will, and often have, 'much reasoning' about these things as to whether they are the truth or not; be it so; act like the Bereans, and 'search the Scriptures daily,' until you have discovered the right road to Zion. There are many paths that look fair and likely, and thousands walk therein, but the *right* road is strait and narrow, it is marked by repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, which, if sincere, produce true holiness of heart and life. This is the narrow way, and alas! few walk therein, for few approve of it. May you be amongst the chosen few. One word more of Paul; he regained comparative liberty, and 'dwelt two whole years in his own hired house;' when he left Italy, visited various places, and again returned to Rome, where he was beheaded by order of the Emperor Nero, about A.D. 68. And now," continued Mr. C——, "our New Testament Histories are completed. It has been my earnest desire and prayer to be

enabled to lay them before you with all simplicity, preaching only the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ. It has been a delightful task, a deeply interesting theme; and may He who has, I trust, enabled me to set before you Jesus, as 'the way, the truth, and the life,' graciously fulfil his promise that his 'word shall not return unto him void,' but that he will bless the seed sown, and cause it to produce much fruit unto his praise and glory. And while I humbly thank him for giving you the willing mind to attend, I bless him for employing so unworthy an instrument as myself in his service, and I would request you to remember me in your prayers, that grace may be given to me to go forward in the work appointed me, and enable me faithfully 'to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.' So saying, Mr. C—— arose, and amidst the regrets and blessings of his people left the room.

THE END.

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